

The Piercing Truth

What you need to know about oral piercing

The history of piercing

- Piercing has been a custom of many civilizations for thousands of years.
- Piercing was used to mark different events in the course of one's life such as birth and adolescence.
- Body piercing with jewelry is considered body art. The jewelry is worn in different and unconventional parts of the body.
- Piercing today has little to do with rituals. It is done to be fashionable.

Oral piercing

- Oral piercing is becoming more popular, especially piercing of the tongue and lips.
- Metallic or plastic jewelry is often worn in the lip, tongue, and cheek. The jewelry is usually a stud, hoop, or barbell shaped device.
- If you are considering an oral piercing consult your dentist. Your dentist can advise you regarding health hazards and possible damage to your teeth and gums.
- The mouth contains millions of germs, so infection is a common complication with oral piercing.



Consequences

People are naturally protected from infections by their skin and mucous membranes. When these barriers are pierced, germs have a chance to enter the body.

Some of the serious consequences that can result from oral piercing are:

- hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV/AIDS
- allergic reaction, especially if the jewelry is not made of gold, stainless steel, or titanium
- inhaling of the stud which can cause the airway to be obstructed and could lead to death
- pain
- cyst formation
- speech difficulties
- chipped or cracked teeth (due to the jewelry hitting the teeth or from biting the jewelry)
- damage to gums and other soft tissues in the mouth
- scarring.

Unlike an ear lobe, the tongue is a muscle and contains many blood vessels. Tongue piercing adds additional risks which include:

- Nerve injury to the tongue which can result in permanent loss of taste, sensation, and/or tongue mobility.
- An infected tongue can swell and block the airway which may lead to death.
- Blood clots formed at the wound site may break away and flow through the (turn) bloodstream. If the clot lodges in the brain it may cause a stroke.



- Canadian Blood Services refuses donors for one year if they recently received a body piercing or tattoo due to the risk of infection.

Body piercing studios/parlours

- In Saskatchewan, tattoo and body piercing establishments are regulated by the Health Hazard Regulations under the *Public Health Act, 1994*.
- Most operators learn the trade on the job or from someone else in the business.
- Health Canada introduced infection control guidelines in 1999. They are called *Infection Prevention and Control Practices For Personal Services: Tattooing, Ear/Body Piercing and Electrolysis*. These guidelines outline a standard of practice to help prevent blood-borne diseases and life-threatening infections. This booklet is available at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/publicat/ccdr/99vol25/25s3/index.html> or by calling 1-888-855-2555.

Questions to ask before getting a piercing

- What experience does the operator have?
- Is the operation inspected and approved by the health region?
- Is the business well established and has it been operating in the community for a long time?
- Does the operator follow Health Canada infection control guidelines?
- Is a sterile needle used for each piercing?

- Does the operator sterilize the instruments in an autoclave?
- Is a spore test done monthly to ensure that the autoclave is sterilizing properly?
- What steps is the operator taking to protect themselves and you from blood-borne diseases (e.g. washing hands, wearing new latex or non-latex gloves for each client, cleaning counters, etc.)?
- Does the operator explain the procedure, ask for written consent, and provide after-care instructions?

Oral hygiene

Jewelry inside the mouth can cause oral hygiene problems. When oral hygiene is poor the number of germs present in the mouth increases. This may cause infections. If you wear oral jewelry it is important to:

- use an antiseptic mouthwash after each meal
- brush your jewelry at the same time you brush your teeth
- avoid hard and sticky foods
- have regular dental check-ups.

Piercings can have life-long consequences. If you have concerns or feel unsure in any way, remember, it is okay to change your mind. It is too late to change your mind after the procedure is done.

**Trust Your Instincts:
It's Your Skin You're In**

**For more information
call the Oral Health Program
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