

BBV related risks: Body art

Background Note

Overview

Body art is a popular form of artistic expression, but there is a risk of infection from a blood-borne virus (BBV) if not carried out properly. Tattoos, body piercing, branding, scarification, and three-dimensional art or body modifications, such as beading, are all body art. In Western Australia, the most popular forms of body art are tattoos and body piercing.

Tattoos are permanent designs on the skin. They are made with coloured inks put under the skin with a machine.

Body piercings are holes in the skin made so jewellery can be worn. The holes are made with a sharp instrument.

It is against the law in Western Australia to tattoo (or brand) a person under the age of 16, or between the ages of 16 and 18 without the written consent of their parent. It is also against the law in Western Australia to:

- carry out intimate body piercing (nipples, genitals, anal area, perineum) on a person under 18 years of age, even with parental consent.
- carry out non-intimate body piercing (such as nose, tongue, face, belly button or other skin surfaces except ears) on a person under 18 years of age without written parental consent.
- carry out piercing on the ears of a person under 16 years of age without written parental consent.

Under the Children and Community Services Act 2004, fines and imprisonment may be applied for breaches of the laws relating to age and tattooing and piercing (although the relevant section of the Act does not apply to body piercing carried out for medical or therapeutic purposes).



Health and safety

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If not done properly, tattooing, body piercing and other forms of body art carry the risk of blood-borne viruses (hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV) transmission, as well as bacterial infections, scarring and nerve damage.

These risks may be increased if tattooing, piercing and other body art is done by friends or outside of registered studios. Under health legislation, premises where body art is conducted must be registered with the local government and must comply with infection prevention and control standards.

Teaching tips

Some students may already have body piercings or tattoos or might be considering getting one. It is important to tell students to think about the consequences of getting a tattoo or piercing. This includes:

- Will it affect their chances of getting employed?
- How will their parents react?
- What is your school's policy on tattoos and body piercings?
- Will you be made to take the piercing out or cover up your body art?

Relevant resources

Fact sheets

[Body art](#), Get the Facts

[Body art](#), Healthy WA

[Body piercing, tattooing and branding young people](#), Department for Child Protection and Family Support

Postscript

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This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:

- [What is the legal age for getting a tattoo or piercing and do parents need to know?](#)

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