

BODY PIERCING SAFETY

Introduction

I chose to research this topic because I am a body piercing fanatic. I have several piercings and I plan on getting more in the future. Body piercing is the art of puncturing a part of the body to create an opening for which jewelry can be worn. I see body piercing as a form of expression. Although some piercings hurt during the process of getting them, I think the outcome is beautiful. As beautiful as they may be to me, I now know how ugly they can turn out if not properly taken care of. I did not know much about body piercing safety even after getting my first piercing, but I am now aware of the many risks and dangers that can arise. If the proper safety protocols are not conducted during the piercing process it can cause permanent body damage. Also if not taken care of, it can lead to serious infections. I hope my research will not only help me with my current and future piercings but also give me the opportunity to share this information with others who are planning on getting body piercings.

Section 1: Background and Problem Statement

- **Web site #1 Name:** *Healthy People 2010*
- **Web address:** <http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/html/volume1/14immunization.htm>
- **Background Information:**

Healthy People 2010 do not address body piercing safety; however, one of the goals is to reduce Hepatitis B cases. To reduce this disease by 2010 they want to provide vaccination programs for targeted groups including adolescents and adults in high-risk groups. According to the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (NNDSS), CDC, EPO; Sentinel Counties Study of Viral Hepatitis, CDC, NCID for ages 19 to 24, a total of 24.0 per 100,000 has Hepatitis B. For ages 25

and older it decreases. (This age range is known to contain many of potential candidates for body piercings.)

- **Web site #2 Name:** *WebMD*
- **Web address:** <http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/tc/body-piercing-problems-topic-overview>
- **Background Information:**

Although most people who have piercings do not develop any problems, some can arise. The most common site to pierce is the earlobe, it is easy to heal with no problems but the other areas of the ear which is made of cartilage are harder to clean, take longer to heal, and are more likely to become infected than the earlobe piercing. Other popular sites include the mouth and tongue, nostril, eyebrow, navel, and genital area. Each site has its own set of potential problems. Home treatment can help speed the healing of the wound and prevent problems. At first, the site may seem slightly swollen and might drain blood or fluid. Some potential problems include:

Infection of the mouth, which can cause speech, chewing, or swallowing problems or swelling that can block the throat. Infection of a nipple can scar breast tissue, and limit the ability to breast-feed later. Splitting or tearing of the skin, which may cause the formation of scar tissue. Problems with jewelry include allergies to a metal. Jewelry in the mouth or lips can cause chipping or cracking of the teeth, gum problems, and difficulty swallowing. Jewelry can be come loose and can be accidently swallowed. Jewelry in the genital area can cause injury to your sex partner, cause condom breakage or decrease a man's ability to get or maintain an erection. Lastly, piercings can damage underlying blood vessels and nerves.

- **Web site #3 Name:** *UGAzone*
- **Web address:** <http://www.uga.edu/ugazine/past/s2005/piercing.html>
- **Background Information:**

Body piercing is not for everyone, but flawed preconceptions increase the reluctance of potential candidates to go into this somewhat taboo area. Misinformation leads to health hazards if a new piercer is using improper care. The Association of Professional Piercers is an international, non-

profit group that dispenses health and safety information about body piercing. An APP-certified professional piercer by the name Randy Smyne at Pain & Wonder Tattoos and Body Piercing lists a few myths that are circulating. 1. Piercings can cause paralysis (this is not an effect of the actual piercing). Paralysis is only possible if the infection is allowed to set in. If piercings are properly cared for, it's impossible. 2. It is virtually impossible to blow your nose if you have a nose piercing. Unless the jewelry in the nose is extremely large and obstructive, it does not affect the ability to blow your nose whenever the need should arise. 3. Drinking beer with a new oral piercing will cause a yeast infection to form in your mouth. Although this is false, drinking alcohol is not recommended for new piercings because it can cause excess swelling. 4. If a certain vein in the tongue is accidentally pierced you can bleed to death. Technically this is possible but is extremely unlikely when dealing with a trained professional. 5. Cleaning a piercing as many times as possible will ensure a faster healing time. Piercings should be cleaned twice daily and not more because you don't want to remove healthy tissue. 6. Turning jewelry randomly throughout the day during the healing process is a must. It only breaks the tissue, forcing the healing process to start all over again. APP notes that the only beneficial time to rotate jewelry within a piercing is when cleaning it twice a day. 7. Salt water application is a natural way to heal a piercing. Mild sea salt-water soaks - not solutions made with table salt - should be applied to piercings during the healing process. 8. Any bleeding, bruising, discoloration, or swelling that might occur during the healing process is a sure sign of infection. They are part of the body's normal healing process and are not cause for alarm. 9. If a piercing becomes infected, you should remove the jewelry immediately you want the skin to close up over the infection, resulting in an abscess (a localized collection of pus surrounded by an

inflamed area), then this is the way to go - otherwise, this is not a good idea. Smyre says, once an abscess occurs, the infection will have to be surgically removed 10. Alcohol, peroxide, or Betadine application is good for an infected piercing. While this was once considered a valid aftercare technique, it is no longer deemed an acceptable practice because it destroys new skin tissue. 11. If you have had a piercing for a while, you can take out the jewelry without fear of the hole closing up. The APP warns that even older, well-healed piercings can shrink or close within minutes, even after being there for years, just depends on the individual's body. 12. Genital piercings are much more painful and prone to infection than other body piercings. Contrary to what the taboo nature of this piercing would suggest, this is typically not true. Smyre says genital piercings are generally very similar to other piercings. 13. Piercing yourself is perfectly safe. Leave it to the professionals. Smyre says problems associated with this practice include the lack of adequate sterilization, a clean environment, and the proper tools. 15. Body piercing is just a fad, which won't last. The art of body piercing has exploded in our society in the past 30 years, and shows no signs of dying out. "It's here, and it's here to stay," Smyre says.

Section 2: Research

Some Web site may be .com (e.g., companies publishing scientific journals). If you are not sure if you use a Web site, check with me first.

- **Web site #1 Name:** *My Tribalectic*
- **Web address:** <http://www.tribalectic.com/archives/oct2000/medicalarticle.asp>
- **Summary of the research:**

Judith Greif and Walter Hewitt from Rutgers University Health Services, along with Myrna L. Armstrong conducted a research study on Tattooing and Body piercing, which studied the body art practices among college students. They contacted 18 American universities, as well as an Australian university to assist in the distribution of a survey. They received a total of 828 surveys and used 766 for their study. In regards to the college students with body piercings fifty-

one percent of the respondents reporting having body piercings. Seventy-six reported having one or two piercings. The earliest age reported for an initial piercing was 11 years old and the oldest was 42. The most piercings reported on an individual was 12. As far as health problems associated with the piercings, 30% reported having "no problems". Forty-five of the respondents reported having infections at the site (blisters, pus, drainage, pain, redness), 39% reported skin irritations (short-term redness, dry skin, tenderness). Only 13% percent of these people reported presenting these problems to health professional for assistance in managing their body-piercings. Despite the health problems, 91% reported continued satisfaction with them and 78% would do it again. Two students from different universities reported having Hepatitis after their piercings, even after using sterile, disposable needles to puncture their skin. They did report not having any aftercare instructions provided. 24% of the respondents reported getting nipple and genital piercings for "enhanced sexual experiences" but 69% reported "no change" in their sexual experiences.

- **Web site #2 Name: BMJ**
- **Web address: <http://www.bmj.com/content/336/7658/1426.full>**
- **Summary of the research:**

Angie Bone, a specialist registrar in public health medicine, along with Fortune Ncube (epidemiologist), Tom Nichols (statistician), and Norman D Noah (professor of public health) joined together for a research to estimate the prevalence of body piercing, other than earlobes in the general adult population in England, and to describe the distribution of body piercings by age group, sex, social class, anatomical site, and who performed the piercing. They also wanted to estimate the proportion of piercings that resulted in complications and proportion of piercings that resulted in professional help being sought, after the piercing. They distributed a cross-sectional house survey. These results showed Body Piercing was more common in women than in men, and in younger age groups. Nearly half of the women aged 16-24 reported having had a piercing. Of that age range, complications were reported in 31% of them and professional help was sought with 15.2% of them, and hospital admission was required with seven of these

individuals. They concluded body piercing is common in adults in England, particularly in young women. Problems are also common and sometime assistance from health services is required.

The popularity of the body piercing practice might place a substantial burden on health services.

- **Web site #3 Name: BPS Research Digest**
- **Web address: <http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.com/2008/07/tattoos-body-piercings-and-self-harm-is.html>**
- **Summary of the research:**

Researchers/Psychologist Aglaja Stirn and Andreas Hinz collaborated with the body modification magazine Taetowiermagazin, in recruiting 432 of their readers to complete a survey about their tattooing and piercing practices, and motives. Of the respondents one hundred and nineteen of the participants admitted to cutting themselves during their childhood. These self-harmers reported that they often had their skin tattooed or body pierced to help overcome a negative experience, or simply to experience physical pain. Many of the self-harmers said they had ceased cutting themselves after obtaining their first piercing or tattoo. Stirn and Hinz concluded that most people who partake in body modification clearly do not do it because they have psychological problems; however, because body modifications have become so common and accessible, they are also used with probably increasing frequency as a convenient way to realize psychopathological inclinations, such as self-injury, or to overcome psychological traumas.

Section 3: Statistics

- **Web site #1 Name: BMJ**
- **Web address: <http://arabmedmag.org/issue-01-07-2008/dermatology/main01.htm>**
- **Summary of the statistics:**

As stated before, the findings of the Body piercing in England survey show that piercing is common mostly in woman. The complications from the piercings in woman are also common. According to the statistics, these complications often involved health service providers to be called on. The popularity of the practice, and the fact that complications can occur long after the

actual piercing, might place a considerable burden on the health services for many years. Health care providers have to be aware of the potential complications of body piercings, and the appropriate management of these complications. More research is needed to determine which factors increase the risk of complications, so that information can be used to raise awareness in piercers, their clients, and health services, and also, to improve the safety of body piercings.

- **Web site #2 Name:** Pub Med
- **Web address:** <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1200653/>
- **Summary of the statistics:**

A recent Mayo study found that 51% of 400 college students surveyed had some form of piercing, with ears being the most popular, followed by the navel, and tongue. The survey also found that 17% had an overall incidence of complications associated with piercings. Reported complications from oral piercings and other nontraditional piercings include cephalic tetanus, cellulites, tooth fracture, gingival recession, and even speech impairment. In a review of some European studies from 1972 to 1990, reported nickel allergy as the most common metal allergy, with a prevalence ranging from 7.3% to 17.4%, while cobalt's prevalence was somewhat lower at 4.6% to 7.7% (2). Nickel and gold have been reported as more prevalent causes of jewelry-related sensitization. These allergies were results of jewelry associated with body piercings.

- **Web site #3:** *NY Times*
- **Web address:** <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/06/13/the-complications-of-body-piercing/>
- **Summary of the statistics:**

According to the Health Protection Agency, data shows 25 percent of piercings in the body areas other than the earlobe lead to complications, with one in 100 piercings resulting in a hospital admission. More than 10,000 people ages 16 and up took part in the survey. In another 2002 study of American college students, a high rate of 17 percent of students complained of problems including bleeding and infections. The nipples appeared to be the most risky, with a 21 percent rate of bleeding or injury.

Section 4: Consumer Information

- **Web site #1 Name:** *Center for Disease Control & Prevention*
- **Web address:** <http://www.cdc.gov/features/bodyart/>
- **Summary of the information:**

The CDC lists some safety and health practices on their site that can help in protecting body piercers from infections. The first is to single-use, disposable piercing needles on one person and throw them away after. Reusing needles is not safe. When used needles need to be disposed they must be thrown in a biohazard-labeled, disposable container to protect the client and person changing or handling the trash bag from getting a cut. Gloves should always be worn while working with equipment and clients, changed when necessary and not reused. Some tools and equipment can be reused when creating body art. These tools and equipment should be cleaned then sterilized to remove viruses and bacteria. Chairs, tables, work spaces and counters should be disinfected between procedures to protect both the health of the client and the artist. Cross-contamination (spreading bacteria and viruses from one surface to another) can occur if surfaces are not disinfected frequently and between clients. Any disinfectant that claims to be able to eliminate the tuberculosis germ can also kill HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C viruses. Use a commercial infectant, following the manufacturers' instructions, or a mixture of bleach and water.

- **Web site #2 Name:** *Piercing Pictures*
- **Web address:** http://www.piercingpictures.org/piercing-safety_1.html
- **Summary of the information:**

There are additional points that should be kept in mind before body piercings. Before undergoing piercing, you should eat a light snack. Going under piercing without eating can lead to dizziness. Alcohol-containing substances should never be applied to freshly pierced spots unless it's recommended by the professional. The adornments chosen should be made of biologically inert metals such as gold, platinum, titanium or surgical steel. This is because they will be planted into soft tissue and non-inert metals can cause reactions to the skin. All jewelry as

well as equipment should be sterilized. If anything goes wrong during the piercing experience, a person should turn to a doctor for advice as soon as possible. A single hour is crucial and matters a lot in certain cases.

- **Web site #3 Name:** *Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health*
- **Web address:** <http://www.wdghu.org/page.cfm?id=938>
- **Summary of the information:**

Different piercings take different times to heal depending on the area of the body. Tongue piercings take about four weeks to heal. Earlobe and eyebrow piercings take about six to eight weeks to heal. Ear cartilage and navel piercings take about four months to one year to heal. Lip piercings take two to three months to heal. Nostrils take two to four months to heal. Nipple rings take about three to six months to heal. These are average estimates, and some individuals may take more or less time to heal.

Section 5: Solutions to the Problem (or Issue)

- **Web site #1 Name:** *Broward County Health Department*
- **Web address:** <http://browardchd.org/environmental/BodyPiercing.aspx>
- **Summary of the information:**

Broward County Health Department in Florida is one of many state health departments that require certain precautions to prevent body piercing problems. Annual inspections are conducted in Broward County to prevent the spread of blood-borne diseases. These inspections are done using prescribed minimum sanitary and safety requirements, related to the design, operation, and maintenance of body-piercing salons and temporary establishments. Body piercers are required to obtain annual training in safety, sterilization, and sanitation. The Broward County Health Department provides two training classes each year so piercers can update on rule changes, receive educational updates and discuss issues in their profession.

- **Web site #2 Name:** *Northern Kentucky Health Department*
- **Web address:** <http://www.nkyhealth.org/mx/hm.asp?id=tattoo>
- **Summary of the information:**

On April 1, 2004, a 2000 Kentucky law went into effect. This law requires the Health Department to inspect and provide certification to body piercing studios or ear piercing studios meeting the regulations. Not only for the studio but also for every artist or piercer. They must obtain a registration from the Health Department. Since the April 1993, the Health Department has been responsible for inspecting and certifying tattoo studios. As there is for tattooing, there is a detailed list of specifications to meet in order to be in compliance to the law. The regulations include the health and cleanliness of the facility, sterilization of body piercing instruments and equipment, single use of needles, hand washing, wearing of gloves and appropriate records of sterilization procedures and clients receiving the service. A requirement for tattoo and body piercing studios mandates a written notarized consent, of a custodial parent or legal guardian before anyone under 18 years of age can obtain a tattoo or body piercing. These items, among others, are included in the Health Department's inspections done a minimum of once a year for ear piercing studios and twice a year for body piercing studios, just as it is for tattoo studios.

- **Web site #3 Name:** **National Conference of State Legislatures**
- **Web address:** <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=14393>
- **Summary of the information:**

The issue of whether or not teenagers may receive tattoos or body piercings has not entered states legislatures. Advocates of prohibiting minors from getting tattoos or body piercings want state laws to reflect parental rights and allow them to have the final word on minors altering their appearances. Several states have laws prohibiting these practices on minors without parental consent. Twenty-eight states have laws that prohibit both body piercing and tattooing on minors without parental permission. Many of the laws across the country establish financial penalties, prison time or both for violators. Most laws call the "violation" as the person who performed the tattoo or piercing. For example, for the state of Connecticut, it is required that written consent of the minor's parent in order to perform body piercing on an un-emancipated minor under the age

of 18. These laws are one way to limit the amount of underage teens exposed to this risky behavior.

Conclusions

I learned a lot from developing this fact sheet. I learned all the potential risk of body piercings, the misleading myths about body piercings, some history about the art of body piercing, and nationwide statistics on body piercings. At the conclusion of this assignment, I feel confident in resolving any issues I have with my piercings in regards to my personal health. I am now able to take better care of my body piercings, and I am prepared to get more body piercings in the future. I can't wait to share the information I gathered with my family and peers who are thinking about, or have body piercings. Although the whole research and gathering of resources was exhausting and rigorous, the fundamental learning I earned from this assignment is well worth the time and energy that went into it.

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