

Body Piercing – Know the Risks

Part 4 Summary Offences Act 1953

South Australian Law

- You must be 16 years of age to consent to a body piercing procedure, including earlobe piercing
- You must be 18 years of age to consent to an intimate piercing (genital and nipples) or other body modification procedure, including earlobe stretching
- A parent/guardian must give consent if you are under the age of 16 (but they cannot consent to intimate piercings or other body modification procedures)
- You must take valid photo identification with you (which the studio may ask to photocopy for its records), provide your name and address and sign a written agreement with the studio

Risks involved

Contaminated equipment, unclean premises, unsafe procedures and a lack of infection control knowledge may potentially contribute to the spread of various infections. Infections cannot only occur during the procedure, but can also occur if the piercing isn't cared for properly afterwards. Specific risks include:

- Migration (grow out) due to your body's natural rejection of the jewellery
- Local infections around the piercing site or serious infections involving other parts of your body (such as Hepatitis B, C or HIV)
- Severe scarring, swelling and inflammation
- Allergic reactions most commonly to nickel in body jewellery
- Excessive bleeding
- Jewellery embedding into the skin
- Damage to nerves

- Damaged gums and cracked teeth from lip and tongue piercings
- Dried out and torn piercings as a result of exposure to chlorine in swimming pools.

DO NOT pierce yourself or let your friends pierce you – you will put yourself at risk

Go to a professional body piercer working in an established studio. This will reduce your risk of getting an infection. You can ask the piercer or ring the local council to ask if the studio has been inspected by Environmental Health Officers for compliance with SA Health Guidelines on health and safety.

A responsible piercer should operate from a clean and hygienic studio and should:

- Freely answer questions about their experience, infection control techniques and piercing procedures in their studio
- Know the SA Health Guidelines on the Safe and Hygienic Practice of Skin Penetration and can talk about it with you
- Ask you about any personal health matters which could indicate that you should not be pierced
- Outline potential risks, complications and healing times
- Clean and disinfect the piercing site before piercing you
- Wash their hands and put on new disposable gloves before starting your piercing procedure
- Sterilise all body piercing equipment and jewellery using a functioning bench top steam steriliser (autoclave)
- Open sterilised, packaged needles, equipment and jewellery in front of you. The packaging keeps the item sterile until used



- Never ‘clean’ the jewellery by dipping it into a disinfecting solution before piercing you
- Discuss the aftercare of your piercing and give you written aftercare instructions
- Encourage you to return so the healing process can be checked

If you are taking any medication or have any medical problems such as allergies, skin disorders, a condition that affects your immune system, or if you are pregnant – ask your doctor if it is ok to get pierced or if there are special precautions that you need to take and let the piercer know.

Take good care of your piercing

The best aftercare will depend on various factors as everybody is unique and every piercing is different. It is important to ensure that your piercing heals well without infection.

General aftercare advice:

- **DO** wash hands thoroughly before cleaning or touching the pierced area or jewellery
- **DO** keep area clean and dry
- **DO** clean area with saline solution twice a day.
You can:
 - 1** – Use pre-packaged saline solution from a chemist OR dissolve ¼ teaspoon of non-iodized sea salt to one cup of warm boiled water. Use a cotton bud or smooth pad to clean the piercing and remove any crusty formations and/or invert a cup of the solution over the piercing. Pat dry with clean disposable paper products such as gauze, tissue or paper towel because cloth towels can harbour bacteria and catch on your piercing
 - 2** – In shower clean area with mild, liquid soap. Work into a foam, apply around the area while gently rotating the jewellery. Rinse well under running water. Pat dry with clean disposable paper products for the reasons stated above
- **DO** clean oral piercings by rinsing with a saline solution for 30 seconds after eating or smoking. A mild non-alcohol based mouthwash may be used once a day

- **DO** get enough sleep and eat a nutritious diet. A healthy lifestyle will help your piercing to heal
- **DO NOT** touch the piercing before washing hands
- **DO NOT** over clean area or use anti-microbial, alcohol based or hydrogen peroxide products as this can delay healing time and irritate the piercing
- **DO NOT** use antibiotic ointments, gels and creams as these products can trap dirt and germs in the area

Healing time

Below are estimated healing times for specific piercings. The jewellery you are pierced with should not be removed during the healing time.

Body Part Pierced	Time it takes to heal
Ear Lobe	1 - 3 months
Ear cartilage	6 - 12 months
Eyebrow	2 – 4 months
Nostril	2 - 4 months
Nasal Septum	3 - 4 months
Bridge	3 – 6 months
Lip / Labret	3 - 4 months
Monroe / Cheek	3 - 6 months
Tongue	1 - 3 months
Belly Button	6 - 12 months
Nipple	4 - 6 months
Dermal Anchor/Skin Diver	2 - 3 months

A new piercing will be sore, tender or red for up to three weeks. You should notify your piercer and seek medical advice if you notice any signs of infection such as increased pain, redness or thick yellow, green or grey discharge around the site which may have an unusual odour. Do not remove the jewellery until you seek advice.

Do not get a piercing if you are sick. Being unwell will slow the healing process and increase the risk of local infection.

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