

The following are indications of infection:-

- Redness and swelling
- A sensation of heat at the piercing site
- Pain, especially throbbing or spreading pain
- Unusual discharge. It may be yellowish, greenish or greyish

While it is never inappropriate to contact the doctor, a visit to the piercer may be as beneficial. Do not remove the jewellery as this may aggravate the problem by closing off the drainage for the discharge matter. You might consult the doctor regarding the use of oral antibiotics.

## **Cumbria and Lancashire Health Protection Unit**

# **Skin Piercing**

### **INFORMATION LEAFLET**

**Produced by North West Communicable Disease Policy Sub Group**

### **You must consult your GP if you:-**

- experience a high temperature or feel unwell
- develop swollen or tender lymph nodes (glands), especially in the neck or groin, or under the arms
- experience heat or redness spreading beyond the immediate area of the piercing.

### **Common problems that can be avoided**

- Over-cleaning, vigorous cleaning, or using a cleanser that is too strong can produce symptoms very similar to an infection. The skin may be very tender and appear shiny and there may be a clear discharge.
- Friction caused by tight or heavy clothing, rough sexual activity, or excessive movement of the area can cause dark redness, a hard growth of skin over the scar (keloids), discharge and rejection/migration.
- Stress, poor diet or illness can cause longer healing times or migration of the piercing.
- Occasionally, the selected jewellery may not be appropriate. This may or may not be due to circumstances that occurred after the piercing. If the jewellery is too thin or too heavy, too large or too small in diameter, or not the appropriate style, healing problems may be experienced. The piercer should be contacted if a change in jewellery is required.

### **After care guidelines for skin piercing**

Clients are advised to follow simple aftercare procedure given below:-

#### **A normal piercing**

- May be tender, itchy, slightly red or bruised for a few weeks.
- May bleed a little for the first few days.
- May secrete whitish-yellow fluid (plasma) which crusts on the jewellery, this is not pus.
- May tighten around the jewellery as it heals, making turning somewhat difficult.

### **Cleaning/Healing process**

- Consult the pharmacist about gentle liquid antibacterial soaps containing triclosan, however, if you are sensitive to triclosan there are alternatives available.
- Wash hands well before cleansing the pierce. First let the water help remove any crusted matter, then rotate a little liquid antibacterial soap gently into the piercing for no more than 2 - 3 minutes, then rinse thoroughly while rotating jewellery. Do not allow residue to remain in the piercing.
- Clean the piercing no more than twice a day. Cleaning more frequently may damage the delicate skin cells and cleaning less frequently may invite an infection. When cleaning is not in progress the piercing should be left alone.

- With an oral piercing, after eating, smoking or putting anything in the mouth, rinse with antibacterial mouthwash at a dilution of 50% - 75% to avoid damaging new skin cells. It is also necessary to disinfect the piercing, twice a day, for one month, with a mild antiseptic mouthwash.
- Many piercees have found that vitamin C, multivitamins and a zinc supplement speed regeneration of tissue.
- Hot soaks and compresses, with the optional addition of ¼teaspoon of sea salt per cup of clean water are strongly suggested for navel piercing. Avoid wearing belts, tight trousers or restrictive clothing for about six months - one year.
- Genital piercees (male/female) can use a panty liner to absorb excess moisture and cushion the piercing. Avoid restrictive clothing, irritating clothing or clothing that limits oxygen flow to the area. Any sexual contact should be gentle and latex barriers should be used to protect the piercing from partners' body fluids.

### **Changing and Removing jewellery**

Everyone heals at a different rate. The average healing times for piercing, provided they are cleaned twice daily and treated like new healing tissue, are shown below. It is important to remember that even after the initial healing period, the piercing will still need one full year or longer to completely heal. Always treat the piercing with care and gentleness.

Lip	6 - 8 weeks
Tongue	4 - 6 weeks
Cheek	2 - 3 months
Naval	6 months to 2 full years
Nipple	2 - 6 months
Genital Piercing	4 - 8 weeks

The piercing will not be completely healed for several years. Jewellery should not be changed during the initial healing period (often at least 6 months). Clients should be advised to always wear the appropriate jewellery in the piercing, even when fully healed. The piercer should be contacted, for further advice, if removal of the jewellery is being considered on a temporary or permanent basis.

### **What to do in the case of infection**

Infections are caused by contact with bacteria, fungi or other living germs. Piercing infections can usually be traced to one of the following activities:-  
Touching the piercing with unwashed hands  
Oral contact with the piercing, including your own saliva  
Contact with hair, cosmetics, oils, infrequently washed bedding or other agents  
Going into a pool, hot tub, lake, ocean or other body of water