



Standards of Practice for Ear Piercing

Health (Infectious Diseases)
Regulations 1990

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1. Introduction

Any successful personal service business needs to be safe and hygienic as well as professionally competent.

Proprietors of these personal services must be aware of the possible wider effects of the procedures they employ.

Unsafe or unhygienic procedures not only adversely affect the health of the client but also jeopardise the health of the operator and aid the spread of infectious diseases.

More seriously, where procedures involving penetration of the skin are not managed correctly, they can transmit organisms that cause disease like HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

It is essential for proprietor to be fully aware of the potential dangers of their procedures and to understand the precautions that need to be taken to minimise the likelihood of infection.

The Health (infectious Diseases) Regulations 1990 set out the following basic principles that must be observed by proprietors of establishments that provide personal services.

- 1. The premises must be kept clean and hygienic.*
- 2. Any article to be used for penetrating the skin must be sterile.*
- 3. Any article that has penetrated the skin must be either disposed of immediately or sterilised before being used on another person.*
- 4. Any other article that has been used on a person must be cleansed before being used on another person.*
- 5. Operators must keep themselves and their clothing clean and have no exposed cuts, abrasions or wounds.*

This booklet will help people who carry out ear piercing to comply with the regulation by explaining how infection can be associated with procedures they employ and the precautions they should take to protect their client, themselves and the community.

2. Infection Risks

The potential for serious infection can occur during ear piercing where studs inserted into the ear lobes by means of guns, or other methods such as trocar and cannula or needle and cork, are used to pierce the ear prior to the insertion of rings or studs.

In these procedures it is possible for micro-organisms (germs) to be transmitted from the skin or blood of one person into the circulation of another person.

The person at risk may be the next client treated with a blood-contaminated or serum-contaminated instrument or the operator who, in using some ear piercing instruments, may accidentally sustain a 'needle-stick' injury. An operator with open cuts, sores or broken skin is also at risk from contact with contaminated instruments, blood and serum.

Organisms that can cause infection may also be transmitted in the course of ear piercing procedures:

- Where materials which clients come into contact with are not clean or are not handled and used hygienically;
- Where proper operator hygiene is not observed; or
- Where the structural facilities, furnishing and fittings of the premises are not kept clean and in good repair.

Clients, operators and the community can be at risk.

3. How To Minimise Infections

Skin Preparation

The patient's skin should be clean and free of infection. Prior to the insertion of the studs or the piercing of the ear, the skin should be wiped with sterile disposable swabs containing 70% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol. Allow the ear to dry before continuing with the procedure.

Choice of Ear Piercing Methods

An ear piecing system designed in such a way that contamination of the gun does not occur is highly recommended. In these systems, a pre-sterilised capsule containing the studs and butterflies is inserted into the gun. No contact occurs between the gun and the ear and the capsule is discarded after the studs are inserted.

During any skin piercing procedure, blood-borne viruses such as HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C may be transmitted. All ear piercing guns must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, especially the stud holders to minimise the risk of spreading infection. Guns which have disposable cartridges to hold studs further reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne disease.

Methods of ear piercing using a trocar and cannula or needle and cork are not recommended. Where they are used, all articles that penetrate the skin must be disposed of or cleaned and sterilised in strict accordance with the sterilisation procedures required under the Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulation 1990.

Any other type of ear piercing gun and method of ear piercing should not be used without prior consultation with the Municipal Health Department.

Safe Handling of Studs and Guns

Strict care must be taken when handling ear piercing equipment. Ear piercing studs must be sterile before being used.

- Only use studs that have been taken from a sealed package.
- Do not handle studs with your hands. Make sure you are familiar with the correct loading procedures for the gun you use. All guns should be capable of being loaded without the need to touch the studs or the stud holding devices on the gun.

- Disposable cartridges, used in some guns for holding of studs, must be disposed of after use on each client. These holders may be contaminated and if used on another client may cause infection.
- Any stud packets that have been opened previously or where the pack is split must not be used for piercing. The contents of these packs are no longer sterile and may cause infection if used for this purpose. They can, however be sold in the same way other studs and earrings are sold.

Bleeding

- Any bleeding that occurs in the course of a skin penetration procedure, or accidentally, should be stopped by applying pressure to the wound with a dry sterile disposable dressing.
- Handle both the dressing and the contaminated implement carefully so as to avoid coming into contact with blood or serum from the client or the implement.
- Contaminated dressings or swabs should be carefully wrapped in plastic prior to disposal in the waste bin.
- After treating wounds or handling contaminated dressing, operators should wash their hands thoroughly with an antiseptic lotion containing Chlorhexidine or Povidone-Iodine (PVP) or an alcoholic or aqueous solution of Chlorhexidine or Povidone-Iodine.

Ear Care

Appropriate ear care after piercing is necessary to further minimise the risk of infection. Operators should advise all clients on appropriate care and cleaning of the pierced area.

These are some simple rules to follow:

1. The pierced area, front and back, should be thoroughly cleaned at least twice a day, without removing the earrings. This should be done using an antiseptic cleansing lotion.
2. After cleansing, the earring should be rotated several times.
3. Avoid exposing the pierced area to soap, shampoo or other hair preparations. After shampooing, thoroughly rinse the pierced area and repeat the cleaning procedure in step 1.
4. The piercing stud should not be removed for six weeks. After this time, other post style earrings should be worn for the first six months.
5. If the pierced area should become irritated, itchy, red or excessively sore, consult your doctor.

4. Cleaning and Disinfection Procedures for Instrument

These standards emphasise the use of ear piercing equipment that minimises the risk of contamination of the gun, which in turn will also reduce the risk of spreading infection the next client.

Guns that are designed to use disposable cartridges are preferred. With this type of gun, studs are fitted into the cartridge for piercing and the cartridge is disposed of immediately after a single use.

Operators who use equipment that does not meet these specifications or use other equipment that becomes contaminated with blood or blood products, must ensure that the equipment is appropriately cleaned and disinfected before being reused.

After each use, all ear piercing guns must be cleaned. Cleaning should include a thorough scrubbing action with a detergent. A toothbrush is suitable for this procedure.

All surfaces of the gun should then be cleansed with wipes containing 70% isopropyl alcohol and allowed to dry.

Clean guns should always be stored in a clean covered container when not in use.

5. Operator Hygiene

Operators must wash their hands immediately prior to undertaking a procedure on a client.

Broken skin or infections on exposed parts of the body of the operator should be kept covered with a waterproof plaster. If a cut or abrasion is on the hand, latex gloves should be worn.

Smoking

Operators are not to smoke while undertaking procedures or treatments.

Handwashing

Operators are to wash and dry their hands, using soap or detergent and a clean single-use towel, disposable paper towel or air dryer-before and immediately after attending a client and immediately after using the toilet or handling a nasal tissue or smoking.

Prior to attending any client, operators are to rinse their hands with a bacterial skin cleanser containing Chlorhexidine or Povidone-Iodine (PVP) or an alcoholic or an aqueous solution of Chlorhexidine or Povidone-Iodine.

Clothing

Operators are to wear clean clothing when attending clients.

6. General Hygiene

Structural Furnishing and Fittings

All floors, floor coverings, walls, ceilings, shelves, fittings and other furniture should be constructed of materials suitable for the procedures being undertaken and must be kept clean and in good repair.

Handbasins

A handbasin with hot and cold water supplied through a single outlet, plus soap or detergent and either clean single-use towels, disposable paper towels or air dryer is to be installed in the immediate area where procedures or treatments are undertaken.

Animals

Animals are not permitted in any area where ear piercing is practised.

Linen

All clean linen, towels, and clothing are to be stored appropriately to prevent soiling and contamination.

Soiled linen, towels or garments are to be placed into a suitable receptacle and sent to a commercial laundry or washed with hot water (not less than 70°C) and soap or detergent.

Only clean linen, garments, or towels are to be used or placed on clients.

Equipment

All sterile appliances and equipment are to be stored in a suitable manner to prevent contamination.

Wastes

All wastes, papers, etc. are to be placed in suitable refuse receptacles as soon as practicable after serving each client and removed from the premises daily.



7. Mobile Ear Piercing

Any person wishing to conduct a mobile ear piercing business must register with the Municipal Council every private premises in which ear piercing is carried out. Each private premises and the operator must comply with these standards.

8. Extract from Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1990

Part 6 Special Provisions Relating to Premises

Division 1 Prevention of Infection Through Hairdressers, Beauty Parlours and Similar Businesses and Skin Penetration Premises

Definitions

30. In this division

'Article' means any appliance, instrument, container, applicator, cosmetic, dye, dressing, or thing used in connection with a business.

'Business' means a business listed in section 366c(1) of the Act.

'Premises' means any premises upon which a business is conducted.

Cleanliness of Premises

31. (1) The proprietor of a business or the person in charge of premises must ensure that the premises are kept in a clean and hygienic state.
Penalty: 20 penalty units.

(2) Sub-regulation (1) does not apply to premises where a proprietor conducts a business which is prescribed as an exempt business by regulations made under section 366c(2) of the Act.

Cleanliness of Equipment

32. (1) The proprietor of a business or the person in charge of premises must ensure that:

- a) an article intended to be used for penetrating the skin of a person is sterile before it is used; and
- b) an article which has penetrated the skin of a person or is contaminated with blood is:
 - i) destroyed or disposed of immediately in such a manner as to prevent the infection of any other person; or
 - ii) sterilized before it is used on any other person; and
- c) any other article is clean before it is used on a person.

Penalty: 20 penalty units.

(2) In sub-regulation (1) 'sterilized' means

- a) in the case of a business of a beauty parlour or other similar business, in relation to an article used for skin penetration, sterilized in accordance with Paragraph 3.5 of the Standards of Practice for Beauty Treatment published by the Health Department Victoria in May 1990; and
- b) in the case of a business of tattooing, in relation to any article which is used for skin penetration, sterilized in accordance with Paragraph 3.5 of the Standards of Practice for Tattooing published by the Health Department Victoria in May 1990; and
- c) in the case of a business of electrolysis, in relation to electrolysis needles, sterilized in accordance with Paragraph 3.6 of the Standards of Practice for Electrolysis published by the Health Department Victoria in May 1990; and
- d) in the case of a business of acupuncture, in relation to acupuncture needles, sterilized in accordance with Paragraph 3.5 of the Standards of Practice for Acupuncture published by the Health Department Victoria in May 1990.

Personal Hygiene

33. The proprietor of a business or the person in charge of premises must ensure that each person in the business who is engaged in carrying out any hairdressing or beauty or similar process on any other person or any tattooing, ear piercing, acupuncture or any other process involving the penetration of the skin of any other person:

- a) is clean; and
- b) has no exposed cuts, abrasions or wounds
– before carrying out the process.

Penalty: 20 penalty units