



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Date: August 29, 2017  
To: North Carolina Clinicians  
From: Zack Moore, MD, MPH, State Epidemiologist  
Subject: Infections Associated with Tattoos by Unpermitted Tattoo Artists

This memo is intended to provide guidance to North Carolina clinicians regarding infections associated with tattoos from unpermitted tattoo artists. Clinicians should consider this when evaluating patients with recent tattoos.

### **Background**

In recent months, the North Carolina Division of Public Health has been working with local health departments in the eastern and western parts of the state to investigate skin and soft tissue infections among patients who received tattoos from unpermitted tattoo artists.

There are health risks associated with receiving tattoos, including skin and soft tissue infections (such as those caused by Staphylococcus or Streptococcus bacteria or nontuberculous mycobacteria) and bloodborne pathogens (e.g., hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV). Receiving a tattoo from a tattoo artist operating without a permit places individuals at increased risk for infection.

In order to operate under North Carolina law (Statute 130A-283), tattoo artists must demonstrate knowledge of appropriate aseptic techniques (including safe injection practices) and establishments must meet specific standards of hygiene such as using an autoclave (for the sterilizing of tattoo instruments), a sink for handwashing, and proper storage and disposal of solid waste. The work area or studio must be kept clean and in a good state of repair, and records pertaining to autoclave tests and clients maintained.

### **Recommendations for Clinicians**

Clinicians are encouraged to take the following actions when caring for an individual with a recent tattoo:

- Inquire where the individual received the tattoo. Notify the local health department if the individual reports receiving a tattoo from an unpermitted tattoo artist or in a home setting.
- Assess the individual for skin and soft tissue infections, and consider bloodborne pathogen testing for patients who received tattoos from an unpermitted artist or in a home setting.
- Ensure that HBV and tetanus vaccinations are up to date in individuals who are considering getting a tattoo.

Additional information and links to FDA and CDC resources are available at:  
<http://ehs.ncpublichealth.com/faf/pti/tattoos.htm>