

formation. The skin has become the latest source of parent–adolescent conflict. Adolescents often seek body art as an expression of their personal identity and style. Tattoos may mark significant life events, such as new relationships, births, and deaths. Piercing the ear, nose, nipple, eyebrow, navel, penis, or tongue may sometimes create a health problem. It is a nurse's responsibility to caution girls and boys against having piercing performed by friends, parents, or themselves. Although in most cases piercings have few (if any) serious side effects, there is always a risk of complications such as infection, cyst or keloid formation, bleeding, dermatitis, or metal allergy. Using the same unsterilized needle to pierce body parts of multiple teenagers presents the same risk of HIV, hepatitis C, and hepatitis B virus transmission as occurs with other needle-sharing activities.

A qualified operator using proper sterile technique should perform the procedure. This is especially important if an adolescent has a history of diabetes, allergies, or skin disorders. Adolescents should be informed about the approximate time for healing after body piercing and the care of the pierced area during and after healing. Some body sites need extra precautions. For example, cartilage (ear, nose) has a poor blood supply and heals slowly and scars easily; nipple piercing puts adolescents at risk for breast abscesses. Finally, migration of the piercing is common with naval and other flat skin surface piercing. Piercing guns should not be used for piercing anything other than the earlobe, because guns place the piercing too deeply.

The presence of body art in the form of tattoos and branding is common among adolescents and young adults. Professionals, as well as amateur artists, administer tattoos. The risk to adolescents receiving tattoos is low. The greatest risk is for the tattoo artist, who comes in contact with the client's blood. Adolescents who are amateur tattoo artists benefit from discussions about standard precautions and the hepatitis B vaccination. Many states either have no regulations or do not enforce existing regulations of piercing and tattooing facilities. The local health department is a source of information about local regulatory requirements. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has an excellent website that outlines safety concerns for persons performing and receiving body art (http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/body_art/).