

Body Art and Health Care

(NAPSA)—More and more people from all walks of life are getting tattoos and piercings. Unlike other fashion statements, body ornamentation such as lower-back tattoos and pierced tongues may carry health risks should the wearer need anesthesia care, according to the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA).

A tattoo is a permanent mark or design made on the body with pigment injected into the dermal layer of the skin through ruptures in the skin's top layer. A small needle punctures the skin repeatedly and inserts tiny ink droplets with each puncture. Theoretically, inserting a needle through the pigment of a tattoo may result in a tissue core that contains pigment, leading to possible neurological complications later on.

"The AANA is not opposed to tattoos, and respects people's rights to adorn their bodies however they please," said Sandra Tunajek, CRNA, ND, director of Practice for the AANA. "However, since the jury is still out on whether injecting a needle through a tattoo poses a health risk, we caution anyone interested in obtaining a tattoo to give strong consideration to where it is placed on his or her body."

For example, a popular tattoo location among young women is the lower back. This could be a problem, however, if an epidural is needed during childbirth. While a



Be sure your body ornamentation isn't going to cause you a problem if you need medical care.

study conducted by the Canadian Journal of Anesthesia reported that a woman whose back was completely covered in tattoos received an epidural without incident, the risk of infection is still unknown.

Another anesthesia risk associated with body ornamentation involves pierced tongues. While the ring is easily removed before a scheduled procedure, problems may occur when a patient needs to be intubated—that is, have a breathing tube inserted down his or her throat—to receive urgent care. A tongue stud isn't necessarily the first thing on the anesthesiologist's mind when preparing the patient for emergency care.

For more information on anesthesia care, visit www.aana.com.