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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 1, 2004**

**TATTOOS AND BODY PIERCINGS – RISKY ART  
Health Commissioner cautions patrons about dangers**

While everyone has a right to self-expression, people should be aware of the dangers that may lurk in some tattoo and body-piercing parlors.

In 2002, the New York State Legislature passed a law to set up regulations and to require licensure of tattoo parlors and body-piercing establishments. However, due to budget restrictions, funding to set up regulations and to begin to license tattoo parlors and body-piercing establishments was not included in Governor Pataki's 2004-2005 budget proposal. This does not create a major public health threat but it prompts a reminder of possible dangers to patrons who are unaware of the risks involved in getting permanent body art.

"It's important that residents know that even in today's modern tattoo facilities where there is a good deal of emphasis on cleanliness and sterilization of equipment, there are still health risks associated with tattooing and body piercing," said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. "Health complications from tattooing and body-piercing can range from allergic reactions to contracting a life-altering virus. If proper infection-control procedures are overlooked, there is the risk for contracting infectious diseases such as hepatitis and HIV," added Dr. Lipsman.

Infection is the most common negative result from tattooing. Non-sterile tattooing equipment and needles can transmit infectious diseases. It is critical that all tattooing equipment is thoroughly cleaned and sterilized before use. Even if the needles are sterilized or never have been used, it is important to understand that in some cases the equipment that holds the needles cannot be sterilized reliably due to its design. Individuals can also suffer allergic reactions to the pigments used in tattoo dyes.

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Piercing can also result in infection. Other complications can vary depending on the area where an individual is pierced. For instance, naval piercings are common sites for infection because tight-fitting clothes inhibit air circulation, allowing moisture to collect around the piercing site. Some individuals may react to the metal used for the piercing. A person who has been pierced is susceptible to swollen glands, to metal-allergic skin inflammation, and to having the jewelry implant itself in the skin.

At a minimum, a person who receives either a tattoo or a body-piercing must be sure to care for the area properly after the procedure, to limit the chances of bacterial infection, however no amount of personal cleanliness can prevent infection by hepatitis and HIV viruses from an unsanitary establishment.

“Until funding is available for the public health law requiring specific regulations and licensing of body artists, consumers should use caution and shop around for a clean and health-conscious tattoo parlor or body-piercing establishment,” stated Dr. Lipsman. “Just as the tattoos are permanent, so are some of the possible negative health consequences.”

For more information, please visit the Health Department’s website at [www.westchestergov/health](http://www.westchestergov/health) or call (914) 813-5000.