



Illinois law aims to boost sanitation standards in tattoo parlors

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(Daily Northwestern) (U-WIRE) EVANSTON, Ill. -- Lynn Stransky has a nautical star tattooed on the back of her neck. Stransky, a Northwestern University freshman, said she had wanted a tattoo since she was a little kid.

"Art is important to me, and tattoos are just art on your body," she said in an e-mail. "I decided to get it because it seemed like the right thing to do at the time."

When Stransky got her tattoo, she didn't research any specific places. She just walked into a parlor.

"It looked clean," she said. "They showed me all the sanitizing machines they used there, so I felt pretty safe."

Although the tattoo parlor where Stransky got her tattoo seemed sanitary, a new law signed in the summer by Gov. Rod Blagojevich will require tattoo and piercing facilities to fulfill Illinois Department of Public Health standards in sterilization and sanitation.

Prior to the law, which will go into effect in July 2007, tattoo and body piercing establishments were not legally required to follow any of the state department's regulations.

A study conducted in 2006 by Anne E. Laumann, an NU dermatology professor and Amy Derick found that 24 percent of the American population has tattoos and 14 percent has body piercings.

The study also found that complications from tattoos are rare and that side effects from piercings are common.

Twenty-three percent of those surveyed reported having some sort of discomfort, pain,

swelling, itching or bleeding as a result of a body piercing.

Andy Stadler, a second-year student at the Feinberg School of Medicine, also has a tattoo. Stadler, however, said he made sure to check out the tattoo parlor where he got his tattoo.

"As a medical student, this is an extremely important point that people should know about," he said. "There are health risks to tattoos, but these can be minimized by being careful about choosing a tattoo parlor."

Stadler explained the risks behind getting inked.

"People should remember that the tattoo process is essentially creating a wound to insert the ink, so that wound has to be cared for and kept clean," Stadler said.

Stransky said she was also aware of the health risks associated with getting tattoos.

"A lot of people don't know that it's not supposed to scab over," she said. "You're supposed to wash off all that nasty leaking plasma every hour or two to keep it clean and prevent scabbing."

In addition to remembering the health risks associated with tattoos, Stransky said it is crucial to acknowledge their permanence.

"Get a tattoo of something that makes you happy, not something you think other people will think is cool," she said.

Laumann of NU agreed, saying that tattoo-removal surgery is difficult and painful, as well as expensive.

"Tattoo removal by laser is more effective on black tattoos than colored ones," she said. "The process is painful, expensive and typically leaves a shadow."

Because of the risks and the permanence of tattoos, Stadler said he would advise a friend considering a tattoo to weigh the risks before making a decision.

"I would tell (a friend) to carefully think about why they want a tattoo," Stadler said. "It shouldn't be a 'college thing' or a 'cool thing to do.'"

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