

26

RARE INFECTIONS IN TATTOOS

Sam Dekeyser¹, Christa De Cuyper²

¹*Dermatology UZ Ghent; (Ghent, Belgium);* ²*Dermatology AZ Sint Jan; (Brugge, Belgium).*

Tattooing is over 6000 years old and has nowadays become a widespread and common practice. Yet, a number of complications can occur as a result of the procedure. Among them are infections, of which mainly the rare ones will be discussed. Piercing the skin with a needle creates a portal of entry for micro-organisms. These can originate from the ink or additives, the device, the environment or the skin itself. Most common bacteria are Staphylococcus, Streptococcus and Pseudomonas, which can cause superficial infection but also cellulitis, sepsis or even spinal abscesses. Congenital heart diseases increase the risk for bacterial endocarditis. In traditional (Samoan) tattooing, necrotizing fasciitis has repeatedly been reported, mainly due to troublesome hygiene. MRSA is of concern as it is resistant to many antibiotics and the carriers are often asymptomatic. Mycobacteria such as *M. tuberculosis* and *M. leprae* can be transmitted as well, mostly reported in endemic regions with questionable hygiene. Cutaneous leishmaniasis can occur within tattoos in HIV+ patients. Immunosuppression prohibits proper elimination of leishmania and the latter have preference for macrophage-rich regions such as tattoos. Syphilis inoculation has been frequently reported in historic reports, firstly in 1853. Viral infections are transmissible as well, ranging from viral warts, mollusca contagiosa and herpes to the more severe hepatitis B, C and HIV. Although very rare, fungal infections do occur.

Infectious complications do not only form a threat to the customer, but also to the tattoo professional. Therefore, good awareness of the risks and measures to prevent them is essential, both by the industry supplying the materials, as for the customer and the tattoo professional, but also by the healthcare workers involved.