

A rapid review of physical health risks associated with special procedures (tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture, electrolysis)

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Background

Special procedures, as noted above, **involve piercing the skin and carry a potential risk of infection and other health complications**. This study provides an up-to-date evidence base on the main physical health risks associated with these procedures.

This has helped to reinforce the evidence base for the introduction and implementation of a **mandatory licensing scheme for special procedures practitioners and businesses in Wales**, scheduled to commence in 2024.

This is being introduced under Part 4 of The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017.

Method

Rapid Review of research published between 2015 and 2023.

Preliminary searches identified a large volume of existing systematic reviews in this field.
The review utilised overviews/maps of existing reviews.
Where there was no evidence, a review of new research was conducted.

Results

The study showed that complications and adverse effects that may be associated with Special Procedures include:



Tattooing

- bacterial, viral and blood-borne infections
- allergic reactions
- malignant and benign growths
- sarcoidosis-related reactions
- a range of other skin-related adverse reactions



Semi-permanent make-up

- bacterial and viral infections
- allergic reactions
- sarcoidosis-related reactions
- a range of other skin and eye-related adverse reactions



Body piercing

- fungal, viral and bacterial infections
- allergic reactions
- malignant and benign growths
- sarcoidosis-related reactions
- other skin related adverse reactions
- dental issues



Acupuncture

- infections
- skin allergy reactions
- other skin-related adverse reactions



Electrolysis

Cutaneous sarcoidosis was reported.
Further research is needed.

Research Implications

The Rapid Review has provided robust evidence to further endorse **the requirements of Part 4 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017**, to help to inform the development of the 5 sets of regulations currently in draft, and to support the development of accompanying non-statutory guidance from the Welsh Government.

Future primary research should **employ more robust designs** to gather evidence about the **causal links** between special procedures and adverse physical health events as well as **prevalence** of such events.

More evidence is needed to identify physical health risks associated with electrolysis.

[Click below for the full report](#)

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2023.12.11.23299649v1.full.pdf>