

# SHAPE

## FDA Releases Scary New Tattoo Warning

Infections, allergic reactions, and contaminated ink may cause some serious harm to your body.

By Sophie Dweck | May 05, 2017



You can't walk down the street without seeing someone sporting a few tattoos. In fact, as of 2015, every 3 in 10 adults in the United States have at least one tattoo and only a few stop there. The advent of tiny, trendy tats (like the one Selena Gomez just got) contribute to the popularity, especially among millennials.

But there's some bad news for tattoo lovers. In an updated consumer report, the FDA shares that they've seen an alarming rise of infections and adverse reactions from tattoos. The nastiest culprit? Moldy ink contaminated with bacteria.

Obviously, one of the primary reasons people tend to get infections post-tattoo is because of unhygienic practices and unsterile equipment. But as Linda Katz M.D, the director of FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors explains in the report, the ink itself is a common issue, even if the container is sealed or the label says it's sterile. And ICYDK, some inks used for tattoos contain pigments from printer toner or car paint—not the best for your skin.

How do you know you have an infection? You might notice a red or bumpy rash in the area of your tattoo, and if that's the case, the rash can persist since the ink is permanent, the FDA says in the report. In worse cases, people may develop a high fever, shaking, and sweating that can lead to hospitalization and/or surgery. On top of that, if you're more prone to scarring, scar tissue may develop around the tattoo and can cause raised scars called keloids.

Another common allergic reaction (that wasn't brought up in the consumer report) is actually caused by the *color* of your ink. "Red ink can cause an allergic reaction can persist for years, and then cause reactions in other areas of the body," says celeb dermatologist, [Ava Shamban](#)

M.D. That's because red pigments usually contain cinnabar and can cause a reaction when exposed to the sun, she explains.

So, should you *really* be concerned about getting a tattoo? "The adverse reactions stated are fairly uncommon," she says. "But they do exist and when those complications occur, they can be quite severe." Plus, keep in mind, there are a lot more reactions happening that are not reported to the FDA, she says. In addition to the common red ink allergy, other common tattoo reactions include inflamed rashes and itchiness. "Think twice before getting a tattoo," Dr. Shamban says. In fact, "maybe think three or four times because it can cost \$150 to get a permanent tattoo and several thousands of dollars just to remove it." And if you really must get that tattoo, you might want to opt for black as a precaution, because those are the easiest to remove, she adds.

Bottom line: Make sure you do your research on the tattoo parlor in advance and know how your skin commonly reacts to products and procedures. If you're prone to allergies and have sensitive skin, you're more likely to experience one of the more common reactions, so it may be best to skip and opt for a temporary tat instead.

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