

# Safety Culture in Practice: Navigating Gaps in Biosafety Guidance for Body Piercings



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# Purpose & learning objectives



*Safety culture* is also about acknowledging the safety considerations unique to each employee

- 1.** Identify the limitations of how body piercings are currently addressed in global and institutional biosafety documents
- 2.** Recognize the most common risks associated with body piercings (and jewelry) in a laboratory setting
- 3.** Discuss strategies to minimize the risks posed by body piercings in laboratories



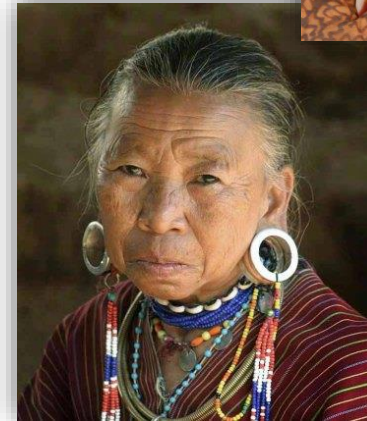
# Body piercings

The insertion of an ornament into a perforation made in the tissue for decorative, cultural, spiritual, or other reasons



Also...

- Bellybutton
- Nipple
- Genitals
- Etc.!



# Body piercing prevalence in the US

Nearly **36%** of Americans have a piercing (in an area other than the earlobe)

Statista, 2017

Around **72%** identify as female

Most common age group **25-34** years of age

Pew Research, 2004

Reddit · r/labrats  
30+ comments · 2 years ago

### Piercings in a lab? : r/labrats

I've got my lobes stretched and a nose ring, I've worked with people with their ear piercings, lip, eyebrow, septum, tongue. they just ...

20 answers · Top answer: Are they clean and not super crusty? anything goes. I've

General **piercing/body** modification policy for Clinical ... - Reddit Jun 3, 2018

How acceptable are **piercings** in **labs**? : r/medlabprofessionals Apr 20, 2019

Stigma with having **piercings/tattoos** in a **lab**? : r/labrats - Reddit Mar 1, 2024

Tattoos and **Piercings** in the **Lab** : r/medlabprofessionals Sep 12, 2021

RE: [ABSABiosafety] Tattoos and piercings in the lab



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To absabiosafety@mail-list.com



# What does the guidance tell us?

No documents mentioned piercings but some mention jewelry

LABORATORY BIOSAFETY MANUAL  
FOURTH EDITION  
AND  
ASSOCIATED MONOGRAPHS

LABORATORY BIOSAFETY MANUAL  
FOURTH EDITION

**Core Requirements:** "Cover or remove any **jewellery** that could tear gloves, easily become contaminated or become fomites."

**Heightened:** "Respirators will only provide effective protection if the wearer is free of **jewellery** in the area of the face seal."



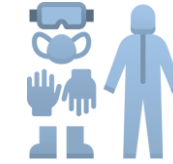
Biosafety in  
Microbiological  
and Biomedical  
Laboratories

6th Edition

**BSL-4/ABSL-4:**  
"All personal clothing and **jewelry** (except eyeglasses) are removed in the outer clothing change room."  
*pg. 56, 104*



Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada  
**CANADIAN BIOSAFETY STANDARD**  
For Facilities and Territories  
Third Edition



Based on an LRA, certain **jewellery** may be worn in the containment zone if there is minimal risk it could damage PPE, become contaminated (e.g., if it is covered by PPE), or it is unlikely to be exposed to contaminated material or aerosols (e.g., the **jewellery** is in the nose or mouth).  
*Section 4.4.22*

"**Jewellery** that may become contaminated or compromise PPE to be removed or covered prior to entering the containment zone" *Section 4.4.12*

# What does the guidance tell us?

Top 25% of  
NIAID-funded  
institutions

44  
institutions  
with biosafety  
documents

10 with  
jewelry-  
related  
statements



3 mention  
interference  
with PPE



4 mention  
potential for  
contamination



6 mention  
“loose” or  
“dangling”  
jewelry



1 says to  
remove with no  
explanation



# Concerns with piercings in bio labs



**PPE  
hindrance**



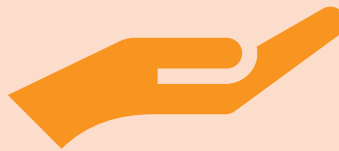
**Injury or catch  
hazard**



**Contamination  
or fomite risk**



# Piercing-related incident



Student was admitted with an infection/lesion in an **eyebrow piercing** and finger (UK, 2002)



Student had been inoculating mice with vaccinia (WR strain);

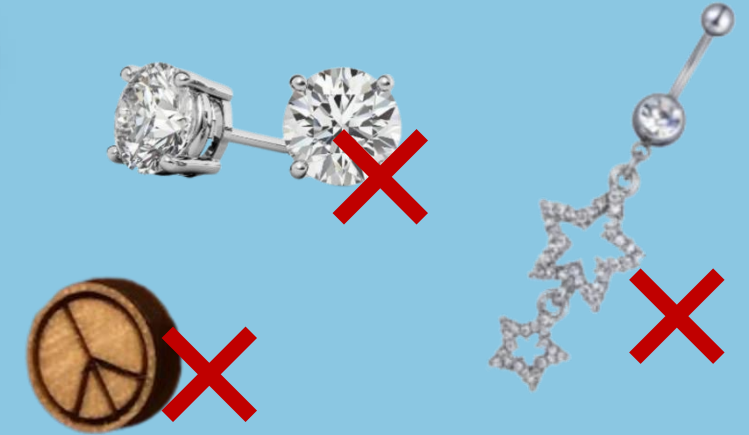
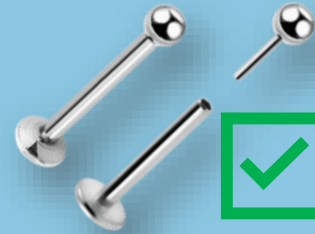
**Eyebrow piercing was likely infected from the finger lesion**



# Examples of risk mitigation strategies

## Select small, low-profile jewelry

- Avoid jewels & inlays
- Avoid dangling jewelry
- High-quality material, easy to decontaminate



## Cover piercing



# PPE & piercings



Covers facial piercings



Covers ear piercings



Covers everything!

## Isn't it easiest to just remove them?

- Fresh and newer piercings may close
- Removal of jewelry from certain types of **healed** piercings may result in shrinkage of piercing hole or “*fistula*”
- Scar tissue, micro-tearing, delayed healing, and other issues can occur from re-inserting jewelry

Is requiring removal more trouble than finding workarounds?



# Summary

Biosafety guidance is limited regarding wearing body piercings into laboratories

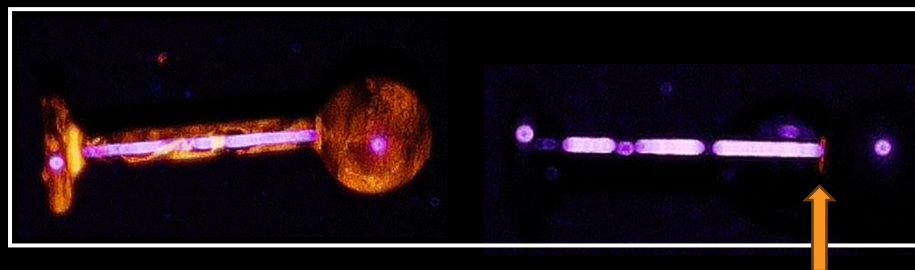
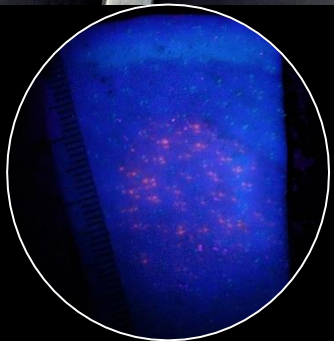
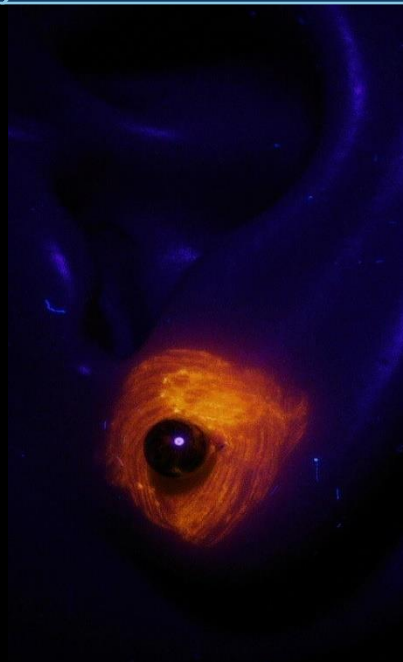
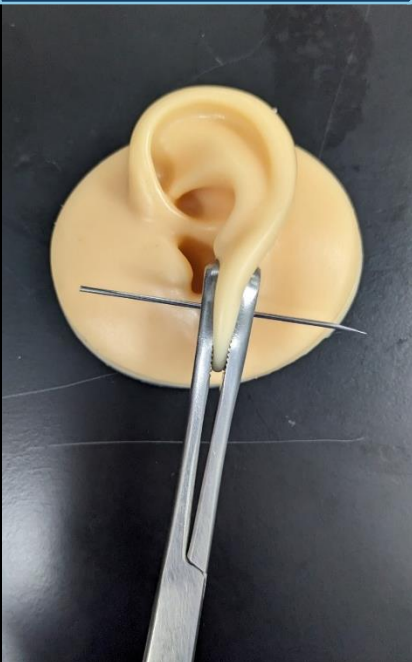
Risks associated with jewelry include:

- Hindering fit/function of PPE of wearer
- Causing injury to wearer
- Becoming contaminated/fomite and causing harm to others

There are ways for safety professionals and employees to mitigate these risks and preserve safety culture and individuality in the workplace



# Safety culture in practice



Poster #17

# Collaborators



**Dr. Dennis Bente &  
Laboratory, UTMB**

Check out their presentation  
(Session V) and poster on  
viral decon & hair



**Emma Morris & Scott Jania  
Ministry for Primary Industries, NZ**

Developing Cosmetic Body  
Modification Policy!



# Acknowledgements



MRIGlobal Biosafety & Global Engagement team

- Jay Bickell
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- Lolly Gardiner
- Scott Shearrer
- Jane Alam
- Devyn Worthley
- Ami Patel
- Matt Anderson
- Kenny Yeh

Check out our poster (#17) on  
piercing & skin surrogate  
decontamination!

Check out their poster! (#15)  
“Using Tabletop Exercises to Support the  
Development of New Vivaria and Insectary  
Processes and Procedures”

# References & image citations

**Slide 3:** <https://www.healthline.com/health/vertical-labret>

<https://bodyartforms.com/blog/nose-piercings-in-india>

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<https://earthcandyarts.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/cj004580.jpg>

**Slide 5:** Flaticon users: Kosonicon, Vectorsclub, Freepik, rddrt

**Slide 7:** <https://zatiknatural.com/blogs/news/tagged/heal-damaged-skin>

Etsy – ChicEarrings

<https://harrisjewelersnm.com/blogs/rio-rancho-and-albuquerque-jewelers/5-tips-to-protect-your-jewelry>

**Slide 8:** Chronic Ink

**Slide 9:** Atom X Supply; Vossagin; Amazon – Niaspi; Shein

**Slide 10:** Fisher Scientific; MSA Safety; Honeywell




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# THANK YOU



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