

Guidance notes 3 (GN3): Use of anaesthetics

This authority's advice in relation to the use of anaesthetics is particularly relevant to tattooists and body piercers but also useful advice for therapists who carry out treatments that involve a degree of discomfort such as waxing, electrolysis and micropigmentation.

All clients should expect to experience some degree of pain for any of the above treatments.

The administration of local anaesthetic injections by persons other than medically qualified practitioners (doctor/dentist) is illegal, and therefore not permitted.

External application of topical anaesthetics (creams/gels/sprays) to clients can be deemed an offence under the Medicines Act 1968. The legislation stipulates that only persons who hold a product licence (generally pharmacists) may supply these products for use in medical applications. Their administration by body piercers, tattooists or therapists on clients for cosmetic purposes can therefore be deemed an offence.

All topical anaesthetics fall into one of three classifications:

Prescription only medicines (POM)

These products are supplied only by a pharmacy against a doctor's prescription and are valid only for use by the person to whom the doctor prescribes it. The use of this would be inappropriate unless the client's doctor has prescribed it.

Pharmacy medicines (P)

These products can only be supplied at a pharmacy under the supervision of a pharmacist, who deems its use suitable for the person concerned.

General sales list medicines (GSL)

These products can be purchased at any type of shop as suitable for general use.

When considering the use of a topical anaesthetic, piercers, tattooists and therapists are advised to take a benefit 'v' risk approach. If the associated risks of use outweigh the likely beneficial effects then the anaesthetic should not be used. For example, specific problems regarding the use of ethyl chloride spray includes the following:

- the product itself is not sterile and can therefore potentially cause an infection
- to have a good numbing effect, the spray must be applied in quite high doses to reach the nerve fibres below the skin
- this presents the likelihood of burns being caused to the skin, particularly in cases of smokers and diabetics, which opens the way for infection
- the product has been shown to be a respiratory irritant, resulting in inhalation risks particularly when used on or near the face
- the product is highly flammable and must therefore be considered carefully in terms of health and safety during usage, storage etc

The use of relaxation techniques by an experienced piercer, tattooist or therapist to



put a client at ease and gain their confidence, combined with a fast, smooth and accurate treatment technique can be far more effective than the application of a topical anaesthetic.

While it is strongly recommended that you only carry out treatments within these guidelines, we are aware that some clients may request the use of an anaesthetic particularly prior to piercing. In this respect, it is recommended that a topical anaesthetic be administered only after consultation with the client as to the risks involved and obtaining a signed consent form to this effect. Where persons under 16 years of age are concerned, the parent or legal guardian must also countersign this consent.

Even with consent, you are reminded that the use of any anaesthetic, be it by oral, injection or topical application, may leave the user open to prosecution under the Medicines Act 1968 or Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.