UV tattoo for you? [1]

Dear Alice,

A friend of a friend told me all about this ultraviolet/blacklight tattoo method. It was deemed unsafe earlier when it first came out, but apparently now it is completely safe. This friend of a friend said she does these tattoos all the time now and is really good about not scarring. So I'm not worried about anything like scarring being seen, I'm just worried about getting cancer and other accusations when ultraviolet tattoo first came out.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Despite your friend's glowing reviews, experts are still in the dark when it comes to the safety of black light tattoos. In the absence of scientific research about this unique form of body art it's difficult to see where the facts end and myths begin.

The tattoo method you mentioned uses a special kind of ink that glows under ultraviolet (UV) or black light. Some UV inks are tinted like regular tattoo ink, while others work like invisible ink, hidden to the naked eye but brilliant under black light. UV tattoos will not glow in the dark like the star stickers kids stick on the bedroom ceiling; they only light up under black light. The secrecy of UV tattoos appeals to many ink enthusiasts who don't want to make a full-time commitment.

Research about the safety and long-term effects of tattoos has not kept pace with the growing popularity of black light tattoos. Scientists at the FDA's National Center for Toxicological Research (NCTR) have just begun to investigate the safety of tattoo pigments, but so far there is no evidence to confirm or deny the claims about a link between UV ink and cancer. However, some dermatologists report more adverse reactions like skin rashes and infections caused by black light ink than traditional tattoos.

Some tattoo artists claim that UV ink is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). However, these advertisements fail to mention that UV inks are FDA-approved for use as a tracking device in fish and other animals, not for tattooing on humans. In fact, the FDA does not regulate tattooing and has not approved any tattoo pigments for injection into the skin.

If you decide to go ahead with a UV tattoo, here are few tips to keep in mind:

- Find a tattoo artist who has experience with black light work
- Ask to see the material safety data sheet (MSDS) that lists the ingredients in the ink
- Avoid UV inks containing phosphorous, a chemical known to trigger skin rashes and leave brown scars
- Keep a close eye on your new tat and seek medical attention right away if you notice any signs of infection

Given the lack of research and regulation about tattoo inks, there's no way to tell which ones are "completely safe." As the folks at the FDA recommend, it's wise to "think before you ink."

Alice!
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Published date:
Jul 17, 2009
Last reviewed on:
Apr 24, 2015

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