

Legislation will restrict body piercings

Beginning July 21, individuals younger than 18 will need parental consent.

BY EMILY BEAVER
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Briana Park, 15, of North Huntingdon Township, can show off the new silver barbell with a diamond gem in her navel when she goes swimming this summer.

But other teens could have a harder time getting body piercings this summer, and they can blame — or thank — state lawmakers.

Legislation passed last month will require parental consent before individuals younger than 18 can have their tongues, navels, ears or other body parts pierced. The law, which takes effect July 21, calls for a fine of as much as \$2,500 and/or one year in jail for piercing a minor without the permission of a parent or guardian.

Nick Christofano, a body piercer at Unique Ink, in Greensburg, said the law won't change procedures at his shop or the shops of most of his colleagues.

"They've never really pierced without parental consent," he said.

Unique Ink doesn't pierce or tattoo minors at all, Christofano

said, adding that most reputable piercing shops already have policies that prohibit piercing minors without parental consent.

"That's the law for tattooing," he said, referring to legislation passed in 2001. He said most reputable piercers have chosen to adopt the same standard.

More than 40 states have some kind of legislation about piercing minors, said Megg Mass, the outreach coordinator and legal contact for the Association of Professional Piercers. The association is an international nonprofit organization, based in Georgia, that aims to educate piercers, health-care providers and the public on health and

safety issues involved with body piercing, said Caitlin McDiarmid, the administrative assistant for the association.

Tattoo You III, in Belle Vernon, also refuses to pierce minors without parental consent, said Steve Witt, who described himself as the shop's "head tattooist."

"We've always treated piercings like tattoos anyway," he said. "How many 16-year-olds do you know who should be able to surgically change their bodies?"

Tracy Park, of North Huntingdon Township, said she allowed her daughter Briana to

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Briana Park, 15, of North Huntingdon Township, shows off her newly pierced navel as her mother, Tracy, looks on. Legislation that will go into effect July 21 will require individuals younger than 18 to have parental consent before getting any piercings.

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have her navel pierced for her 15th birthday, which was in March. She said she agreed to let her daughter get the piercing if she made the honor roll at school.

Briana Park said she was nervous about the procedure, but "felt a lot better" because her mother was in the room with her while it was done.

The teen said "almost all" of her friends have pierced their navels, and she was glad her mother was involved in her decision.

Tracy Park said she was required to provide identification proving she was Briana's mother before technicians at Cool Tats for Cool Cats by Duke, in Irwin, would perform the procedure.

After her daughter's midsection was treated with antiseptic, a hollow needle was used to pierce her navel, and the jewelry was inserted.

"I just feel that certain decisions should be made by responsible adults," she said. "Especially when there are risks to be had, such as infection."

Tim Azinger, director of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Professional Tattooists & Body Piercers, based in Allegheny County, said nothing is going to change because "now there's a law on paper."

"As the father of three young daughters, I tried to imagine myself in that parent's position."

REP. STEPHEN MAITLAND
LEGISLATION SUPPORTER

"Tattooing and piercing has always been a very self-regulating industry," he said. "Safety and sterilization laws we have no problem with, because these are things we already do."

No state law enforces safety and sterilization procedures in tattoo parlors and piercing shops, a state Department of Health spokesman said, although some communities, including Philadelphia, have their own regulations.

Christofano said he, like many others in his trade, favors laws that would set safety standards.

But he suspects that few legislators are aware of safe piercing and tattooing techniques.

Azinger echoed his concerns.

"I don't think many legislators have stepped inside a studio or have any inkling of what goes on in a piercing or tattoo studio," he said.

The new piercing legislation was proposed by state Rep. Stephen Maitland, a Republican who represents Adams and Franklin counties. He said he

has witnessed ear piercing but has not seen any other piercing procedure.

Maitland said he first proposed the new rule about seven years ago at the request of a Gettysburg mother who was upset about her 14-year-old daughter's pierced tongue.

"As the father of three young daughters, I tried to imagine myself in that parent's position," the legislator said. "There are health risks involved."

Most health concerns related to piercing are the result of work that is not done professionally, said Holli Jubec, a body piercer at Dermagraffiti, in Scottsdale.

"It's very rare that a person has a problem with a tattoo or piercing if it's done properly and taken care of properly," she said. "Unfortunately, there are a lot of 'scrub shops' that will pierce anyone and don't know what they're doing."

The new law will require minors to obtain parental consent even for ear piercing, Maitland said, although it does not criminalize people such as teenage girls who might "pierce each other's ears at a slumber party."

These people do not fall under a "reasonable" standard of responsibility, he said.

Witt said he is "dead set" against untrained piercers and tattoo artists who work out of their homes, because of the health and safety risks involved.

These people are unlikely to sterilize their equipment properly, he said.

Still, Witt said, the new law is unlikely to stop minors from having their bodies pierced.

"I tattooed myself at 14 with a needle and a broken ink pad," he said. "If a kid wants it bad enough, he'll find somewhere to do it."

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