



Tongue Splitting and Piercing are serious health hazards

The Australian Dental Association (ADAVB) has warned the public on a number of occasions about dangers associated with tongue piercing, although the practice appears to be increasingly popular. Regrettably, tongue splitting has now emerged as another oral health risk.

Tongue piercing can result in serious problems such as trauma to teeth (due to constant hitting with a metal object), interference with chewing and speaking, hypersensitivity to metals, foreign debris in the pierced site leading to bacterial, viral and fungal infections, and difficulty in breathing from airway obstruction due to swelling from infection.

The mouth is teeming with bacteria, which causes no harm unless the bacteria gets into deeper tissue. Piercing and tongue splitting allow bacteria to penetrate to the inner tissue of the tongue where it has the potential to cause serious infections and even toxic shock syndrome. Tongue splitting can cause permanent numbness, speech impediments and loss of taste.

Piercing also puts people at risk of contracting blood borne hepatitis. Additionally, this can result in secondary infection, which can be life-threatening.

Dentists point out that metal inserted into the tongue constantly hits the teeth and can chip or fracture the enamel, sometimes leaving the nerve exposed. Microscopic cracks, which are difficult to diagnose, may also appear causing severe pain. Damage can be so severe that a full crown may be the only way to save a tooth.

Tongue piercing involves a needle going through the midline of the tongue to insert a stud/s, hoop/s or a barbell shaped piece of jewellery. Oral piercing is usually done without anaesthetic. With no complications, healing usually takes four to six weeks.

The ADAVB recognises that people have a right to freedom of expression but they should not agree to changes to their mouths without understanding the serious risks involved.

The ADAVB believes that there are risks to oral health arising from tongue and lip piercing. People should be aware that the retainers on lip rings could damage their gums, and possibly threaten the future of adjacent teeth.

Where people are considering having their tongues pierced, they must ensure that the practitioner providing the piercing is aware of their oral anatomy. There are nerves at the back of the tongue, which if severed through piercing, could lead to permanent nerve damage. The use of underground or amateur tongue piercing or splitting services can pose serious risks of infection. In one recent case, a patient was found to have a brain abscess resulting from a tongue piercing.

Horror stories have also been reported of studs dislodging and pins or barbells becoming "lost" or "submerged" inside the tongue, requiring oral surgery to retrieve them.

For more information, or to arrange an interview with an ADAVB spokesperson, please contact:

Sarah Harvie or Rhys Ryan at PR Works on:
Phone: (03) 9289 9599
Mobile: 0402 217 956 or 0408 527 873
Email: sharvie@prworks.com.au or rryan@prworks.com.au