



Eyeball tattooing

Eyeball tattooing can only be performed by a medical practitioner. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists advises against eyeball tattooing.

What is eyeball tattooing?

Eyeball tattooing is permanent colouring of the white of the eye (called the sclera). It is performed by injecting ink with a needle underneath the top layer of the eye onto the sclera, in several locations, from where the ink then slowly spreads to cover the sclera. It is permanent and non-reversible.

What are the risks from eyeball tattooing?

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) consider eyeball tattooing a high-risk procedure and recommend that it only be performed by a doctor when medically indicated, such as for specific eye abnormalities.

RANZCO advises against eyeball tattooing for cosmetic purposes, as they describe it as “...an extremely dangerous, irreversible procedure that can lead to blindness.”

There are many potential health risks from undergoing eyeball tattooing. They range from mild risks including eye irritation to severe risks such as blindness. The long-term risks are currently unknown.

The current known risks include:

- perforation of the eye which can lead to blindness (the sclera is less than one millimetre thick)

- retinal detachment leaving the patient blind
- Endophthalmitis (infection inside the eye, that can lead to blindness)
- Sympathetic ophthalmia (an autoimmune inflammatory response that affects both eyes and can result in blindness)
- transmission of blood borne viruses from unsterile equipment.
- bleeding and infection at the injection sites
- delayed diagnosis of medical conditions as the true colour of the sclera is now hidden (for example jaundice is often a first symptom for many diseases)
- sensitivity to light
- adverse reactions to the ink
- staining of the surrounding tissue due to ink migration.

It is important to note that it is unlikely that the techniques that can be used to remove skin tattoos could be used on the eyeball. Removal of the tattoo is therefore probably impossible.

What are the laws relating to eyeball tattooing in NSW?

Due to the risks, eyeball tattooing is prohibited under the *Public Health Act 2010*, unless performed by a medical practitioner or other prescribed persons. A person who unlawfully performs eyeball tattooing is subject to a maximum penalty of \$11,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment.

Further information

The following resources are also available to help skin penetration businesses and practitioners understand the requirements of the *Public Health Act 2010* and Public Health Regulation 2022. Visit our [Skin penetration resources](#) page on the NSW Health website:

Fact sheets

- Beauty, body art and skin penetration industries
- Body art and tattooing businesses

Other

- [The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists](#)