

BLEACH BATHS FOR ECZEMA

Why do it?

Many people carry bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus* on their skin. This is particularly common in children and adults who suffer from eczema. *Staphylococcus aureus* can contribute to the flaring of the eczema and to ongoing skin inflammation. Complete eradication of *Staphylococcus aureus* in patients with eczema is very difficult, however some therapies can reduce the number of organisms which live on the skin. Recently, the use of regular diluted bleach baths in children with *Staphylococcus aureus* infected eczema has been shown to be effective and safe in reducing the number of skin infections and improving eczema control.

How is it done?

- Add to a full bath tub of water (150-180 L), ½ of a cup (125 mL) of 6% bleach. This is normal household bleach and should be the unperfumed, unscented variety.
- The child can spend a normal time in the bath, generally 5-10 minutes. The bleach baths can be used 2-4 times weekly, with normal bathing on other days.
- Do not place the child's head under the water.

Instructions following the bath

Once the bath is finished:

- Partially dry the skin by patting it with a towel. Do not rub the skin and don't dry completely.
- Dispense the moisturiser from the tube onto a clean plate. Alternatively use a pump pack. It is important not to contaminate the tube of moisturiser with *Staphylococcus aureus*.
- In general any prescribed topical steroids should be applied to the skin prior to the moisturiser, and should not be mixed with moisturiser prior to application.

Are there any side effects?

Rarely minor itch and/or skin irritation may occur with the use of the bleach baths. This may be more noticeable if the infected eczema is severe, and in such cases the process of bathing itself, without the addition of bleach, is likely to be painful.