



Bleach Baths to Help Prevent Staph Infections

All children will occasionally get impetigo (often given the misnomer of “infantigo”), a staph or strep infection that gains entry under the skin by itching, scratching, picking bug bites, etc. Impetigo has always been around as a common skin infection in kids but we now commonly see more serious infections caused by a particularly nasty form of staph known as MRSA, which stands for “Methicillin-resistant Staph aureus”, and which often causes abscesses under the skin. These infections sometimes require surgical draining in the office or in the hospital under anesthesia to heal them, as well as powerful and sometimes unpleasant-tasting antibiotics. One new treatment that can help to drastically decrease the number of these infections and possibly reduce the need for antibiotics in kids with staph is the use of “Bleach Baths.” Here is a simple recommendation that research has shown effective in preventing recurrences of staph infections in your child and sometimes the entire family:

STEPS:

1. Start by adding lukewarm water to fill a tub for a normal bath (about 40 gallons, or at least half a tub of water).
2. Put 1/4 to 1/2 cup of common liquid bleach (for example, Clorox) into the bath water. Check the bleach bottle to make sure that the concentration of bleach (also known as sodium hypochlorite) is about 6%, and not scented bleach.
3. Completely mix the added bleach in the water. This should create a solution of diluted bleach (about 0.005%), which is only a little stronger than chlorinated *public* swimming pool water (your home pool is much less chlorinated).
4. Soak in the chlorinated water for about 10 minutes, bathing as usual with soap as this extra-chlorinated water will not harm sensitive tissues.
5. Thoroughly rinse the skin clear with lukewarm, fresh water at the end of the bath, just as you do after swimming to get the chlorine odor off the skin.
6. As soon as your child (or you) has finished rinsing off, pat the skin dry and be sure to wash all towels and washcloths before reusing.
7. Repeat bleach baths 2 to 3 times a week for a couple of weeks and if this has been a recurrent problem, once a month bleach baths for the whole family will help keep your child and you free of staph.

The following restrictions may apply:

Do not use undiluted bleach directly on the skin. Even diluted bleach baths can potentially cause dryness and/or irritation. Do not use bleach baths if there are many breaks or open areas in the skin unless you are instructed to do so (for fear of intense stinging and burning). Do not use bleach baths in patients with a known contact allergy to chlorine.