



Bleach Baths

The Bleach Bath Plan

Mix 1/4 to 1/2 cup of 6% regular bleach in a full bathtub of water.

Limit bathing time to 10 to 20 minutes.

Use bleach baths 1-2 times per week.

Apply your topical steroid medicine and moisturize after any bath.

If your child is not getting better or experiences any bad reactions, please call us.

Why use bleach baths?

Children with atopic dermatitis (eczema) tend to be colonized by and develop infections (weeping, crusting, and/or pustules) with bacteria such as Staphylococcus aureus including Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus or MRSA.

Infection with Staphylococcus aureus may be painful, may perpetuate or flare atopic dermatitis, and may even lead to hospitalization.

Bleach has antibacterial properties. Dilute bleach baths, similar to the concentration of a swimming pool, may decrease the number of bacteria on the skin. The recommended amount of bleach for use in the bleach baths is safe. In fact, the dilute nature of the bleach bath makes it no more toxic than the average swimming pool.

Recent well-controlled studies confirm previous suggestions that dilute sodium hypochlorite (bleach) baths may help to decrease the infection rates and the severity of atopic dermatitis.

Using dilute bleach baths may decrease how often your child requires topical or oral antibiotics for infection of his/her eczema.

Bleach is a “non-antibiotic” approach. The use of bleach baths may help to prevent the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria.

The goal of using bleach baths is to decrease the frequency of skin infections and to prevent active infections.

Who should use bleach baths?

Bleach baths should only be used in consultation with your doctor.

We often recommend the periodic use of dilute bleach baths for children with atopic dermatitis who are prone to develop secondary bacterial infections.

How do you use bleach baths?

Add 1/4th to 1/2 cup of 6% regular bleach (e.g. 6% regular Clorox bleach) to a full bathtub of water (about 40 gallons), and mix. You may adjust the amount of bleach solution based on the bathtub size and the height of bathtub water. This is equivalent to about 1 to 2 teaspoons full of bleach per gallon of water.

We recommend that bleach bathing times be limited to 10 to 20 minutes and that lukewarm water be used (this is true whether using dilute bleach baths or regular baths). We recommend avoiding excessively hot bath water since it may irritate atopic dermatitis. If bleach is not added to the water we suggest shorter baths of 5 to 10 minutes.

The concentration of bleach in dilute bleach baths approximates that of a swimming pool. Indeed, anecdotal observations suggest that children with atopic dermatitis who swim at outdoor pools (and moisturize afterwards) may experience less severe eczema and fewer secondary infections. Most children eventually only need to bathe in dilute bleach water twice weekly. More frequent bleach baths may be helpful during eczema flare-ups.

Bleach baths are not designed to replace other important treatments for your child's atopic dermatitis, such as moisturizers, topical steroids, antihistamines, and, when needed, antibiotics. Never apply undiluted bleach directly on the skin.

How long should my child use bleach baths?

We often recommend that regular, periodic (e.g. twice weekly) bleach baths be continued for long periods, even when your child's atopic dermatitis has improved.

Because atopic dermatitis may be chronic and your child's tendency to being colonized or infected with bacteria may persist, we often recommend using regular (e.g. twice weekly) bleach baths for months.

Are there any risks of using bleach baths?

Dilute bleach baths are usually very well tolerated. If bleach baths are used as directed, under the supervision of your doctor, itching and irritation of the skin are very rarely experienced. Children with many areas of open, cracked, or broken skin often complain of stinging or pain when the sore is exposed to water. This sensitivity is NOT a direct result of adding bleach to the bath water. We do however understand that children may experience discomfort, and have found that this irritation resolves as the skin improves.

You may notice an odor to your bath water when bleach is added. However, using bleach baths as directed should not cause your child to smell like bleach, unlike frequent swimming pool usage.

Bacteria do not develop resistance to bleach baths.

You should call your doctor (972-284-7770) if your child experiences any adverse reaction to bleach baths.

What about rinsing off after using bleach baths? And what about moisturizers?

After bathing, it is not necessary to rinse off the diluted bleach water with regular water.

However, it is fine to do if you choose to.

It is important to apply your topical steroid medicine and moisturize after any bath (whether using dilute bleach baths or regular water).