

Optimising the Skin Barrier to Infection

Healthy skin is an excellent barrier to infection. These measures aim to improve the condition of your skin as much as possible, and also to reduce the amount of staphylococcal (staph) bacteria on your skin. If you have eczema or dermatitis talk to your health professional about treatment for this, as it will be the most important thing for you to reduce infections.

Routine skin care:

Shower or bathe daily.

Avoid soaps and bubble baths, as these can dry the skin. Use a soap substitute (e.g., emulsifying ointment or other moisturiser) or soap-free wash (e.g., Cetaphil, Derasoft, Johnson's pH 5.5).

Moisturise affected areas and visibly dry areas twice a day.

Keep fingernails short and clean.

Avoid picking, scratching, or skin abrasion as much as possible.

Reduce the spread of staph bacteria:

Wash hands frequently, or use alcohol-based hand rub.

Don't share towels, wash-cloths, clothes, razors.

Use fresh towels and underwear daily (preferably washed in hot water).

Cover any infected lesions or abscesses with a dressing.

Reduce the amount of staph on your skin:

Use antiseptic skin cleanser (e.g. chlorhexidine, triclosan) in the shower, or bleach baths, twice weekly.

- If using antiseptic skin cleanser in the shower, make sure you turn the shower off for two minutes to allow it to work before rinsing it off.
- Sometimes these products can irritate the skin – moisturise afterwards. Stop using if irritation occurs.
- Your health professional will be able to give you information on which products to use, and/or instructions for bleach baths.

Think about other things that may be affecting your skin barrier:

E.g. areas where hair removal is performed, areas where skin chafes, or clothing may be tight or repeatedly rub.

If these areas are affected by recurrent staph infection, try to reduce skin trauma to these areas, e.g. change mode of hair removal, to see if it helps.

Attribution: Senior Medical Experts (SMEs) Capital & Coast DHB and Hutt Valley DHB.