

Bathing with Chlorhexidine Gluconate (CHG)

Using cloths or soap

This handout explains bathing with chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) for patients at University of Washington Medical Center who must use the medicine to protect against infection.

What is CHG?

*Chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) is a medicine that is used to clean the skin. It has **broad-spectrum antimicrobial properties**. This means that it can fight many types of *microbes* (tiny bacteria, fungus, protozoa, or virus) that cause infection.*

CHG comes in 2 forms: packages of moist cloths or bottles of liquid soap. CHG is very safe when used as directed. It kills bacteria and protects users from infection for many hours.

Who needs to use CHG?

CHG is most often used:

- To prepare a patient's skin for surgery, including central line insertions
- To clean the skin when central line dressings are changed
- In daily showers and baths to reduce infections for some patients in the hospital

You need to bathe with CHG every day if you:

- Are in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU)
- Are in a high-risk unit such as the Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT), or Hematology/Oncology (Heme/Onc) units
- Have a *central vascular access device* (central line)



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Why do I need to bathe with CHG every day?

Daily bathing with CHG while you are in the hospital can:

- Help prevent bloodstream infections.
- Protect you from antibiotic-resistant bacteria such as *methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) or *vancomycin-resistant enterococcus* (VRE).

When do I use CHG?

To get the full benefits of the CHG, it is very important that you bathe with it every day while you are in the hospital.

If you **cannot** take a shower:

- You will be given a bath using pre-moistened bath cloths (or soap and water).
- After that, you will be given a bath using CHG cloths.

If you **can** take a shower, you can either:

- Use CHG cloths after your shower.
- Use CHG soap while you are in the shower.

How do I use CHG?

Here are basic directions for bathing or showering using either the moist cloths with CHG or the CHG soap:

- Make sure your skin is dry before using CHG.
- Use CHG on your skin from your neck down. Avoid touching your genital area with the cloths or soap.
- Use regular soap on your face and regular shampoo on your hair.

Using CHG Cloths

- Follow the instructions above under “How do I use CHG?”
- Use 1 cloth per body part. For example, use 1 for neck, shoulders, and chest; 1 for armpits, arms, and hands; 1 for abdomen and groin; 1 for right leg and foot; 1 for left leg and foot; and 1 for back and buttocks. You will use at least 6 cloths.
- Ask for help from your nurse or nursing assistant to wipe your back.
- Your skin may feel sticky for 1 to 2 minutes. This is because there are lotions in the cloth. This feeling will go away once your skin dries.

Using CHG Soap

- Shower as usual with soap and water.
- After your normal shower, wash with CHG soap.
- If possible, let the soap stay on your skin for at least 1 minute.
- Then wash off the soap completely.

Important Reminders

- Use CHG on your skin from the neck down **only**.
- Your skin may feel sticky after you use CHG cloths. This sticky feeling is caused by the moisturizer in the cloths that help keep your skin from getting too dry. This feeling will go away when your skin is dry.
- Do **not** rinse off after using CHG cloths. This way, CHG will keep protecting you from infection.

Can I use lotions after my CHG bath?

- Many lotions are **not** OK to use with CHG. Ask your nurse if the lotion you want to use is OK.
- The “remedy” skin repair cream we use in the hospital is OK to use with CHG. We recommend using it as needed for dry skin.

Are there any reasons not to bathe with CHG?

Do **not** use CHG cloths or soap if you have:

- An allergy to chlorhexidine.
- Had treatment with thiotepa in the past 36 hours.
- Had a radiation treatment that day.
- Any open sores or rash. You can still use CHG on areas of your skin that are not affected by sores or rashes.

Other Cautions

- Children under 2 months old should **not** use CHG.
- Stop using CHG cloths and soap if you develop a rash. Tell your nurse or doctor right away.

How long do I need to keep using CHG?

You will use CHG only while you are in the hospital. You do not need to use it after you go home.

Information in this handout is adapted from Shaffer, J. (2012). *Bathing with Chlorhexidine (CHG) cloths*. University of Michigan Health System.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

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