

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Using Hibiclens as a Body Wash: Confronting the Dangers of Internet Trends

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Abstract

Hibiclens, or chlorhexidine, has recently become a popular Internet trend for its use as a treatment for acne and hidradenitis suppurativa, among other conditions. Hibiclens functions as an antibacterial and antifungal agent, making it an effective tool for use as a surgical scrub and preoperative skin preparation. If used improperly, consumers risk permanent eye injury and deafness. This potent antiseptic can also cause immediate and delayed hypersensitivity reactions on the epidermal layer of the skin. The increasing popularity of Hibiclens on social media has translated to an increasingly widespread buzz surrounding the product, drawing the attention of many medical professionals. Dermatologists must be aware of this trend to effectively counsel their patients on the safe utilization of this product.

Keywords: Hibiclens, Chlorhexidine, Body Wash, Skin Care, Social Media.

1. Introduction

Hibiclens soap, a popular antiseptic skin cleanser, has been trending across various social media platforms, particularly on TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, and is being held in high regard by many users as an effective treatment option for hidradenitis suppurativa, acne, and ingrown hairs. The buzz around Hibiclens is largely fueled by testimonials that emphasize its potent antibacterial properties. Many users report improvement of their hidradenitis suppurativa cysts with Hibiclens. There have also been numerous TikTok accounts of medical doctors raving about its efficacious treatment of inflammatory skin reactions such as acne, folliculitis, and ingrown hairs. Responses to their videos often highlight TikTok users' personal success stories of using Hibiclens for these purposes. Additionally, some athletes and fitness enthusiasts advocate for its use in preventing infections related to sweat and gym equipment.

Chlorhexidine, also known as Hibiclens, is an antiseptic used preoperatively to disinfect skin

and mucous membranes.¹ When used in high concentrations, chlorhexidine is bactericidal, whereas when used at low concentrations, it is bacteriostatic. At high concentrations, chlorhexidine causes cytolysis, leading to cell death. Chlorhexidine has a broad spectrum of activity, although it is more effective against gram-positive bacteria in comparison to gram-negative bacteria. Additionally, chlorhexidine is effective against fungi and yeast, contributing to the popular use of this drug in dentistry to treat *Candida* overgrowth in the oropharynx.¹ Therefore, a clear benefit of using Chlorhexidine is the prevention of infections at surgical incision sites and the reduction of the overgrowth of bacteria and fungi in the oropharynx.

Potential adverse effects of long-term Chlorhexidine use in the oropharynx include discoloration of the teeth, burning and irritation of the mucous membranes, and alterations in taste perception.² Potential adverse effects of Chlorhexidine use on the epidermal layer of the skin include immediate

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and delayed hypersensitivity reactions. Immediate reactions include localized urticarial angioedema and anaphylaxis. A delayed hypersensitivity reaction to Chlorhexidine may occur in those with a history of prolonged use of the product. Commonly, a delayed hypersensitivity reaction to this product will cause contact dermatitis in the location of use.³

Given the potential adverse effects, consumers should cautiously approach the social media trend surrounding using Hibiclens as a full-body cleanser. Chlorhexidine is a powerful antiseptic with various indications, including use as a surgical scrub, pre-operative skin preparation, and *Staphylococcus aureus* decolonization.⁴ Further, it helps treat and prevent worsening hidradenitis suppurativa and acne keloidalis nuchae.⁵ Hibiclens is not recommended for the repeated general cleansing of large surface areas unless necessary for a specific condition.⁴ This trend risks the improper use of the product, including application to the face, potentially causing deafness and permanent eye injuries.⁴ Always talk to your healthcare provider or dermatologist before regularly using this product.

Another implication of widespread antiseptic use worth considering is the development of resistant microorganisms. In a previous study, Kampf acknowledges that while chlorhexidine resistance is rare with proper stewardship, it can emerge with widespread use, as shown in some *Klebsiella* and *Pseudomonas* species.⁶ The threat of microbial resistance becomes more concerning if consumers begin to use the product daily without a recommendation from a provider.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Hibiclens trend should be brought to the attention of dermatologists and primary care physicians nationally, as their patients may be

incorporating Chlorhexidine into their daily skincare regimens. If Hibiclens is indicated for a patient's care or the patient is using the product as part of their routine, providers should ensure that the patient understands the directions for safe use and possible side effects. This trend underscores the importance of discussions surrounding safe skin products and practices, particularly with adolescent and young adult patients exposed to social media fads.

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