



MOLLUSCUM

INTRODUCTION — Molluscum contagiosum is the name of a virus that causes a skin infection. The infection is common and can develop in children and adults. The virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact or by contact with an object with the virus on it, such as a used towel or washcloth. Symptoms of molluscum include small, skin-colored growths on the skin.

Molluscum contagiosum usually resolves on its own without complications after a number of months to up to a year and a half. While treatment for molluscum is optional, it may be performed for cosmetic reasons and to prevent spread to new areas on the skin.

MOLLUSCUM SYMPTOMS — The most common symptoms of molluscum include:

A bump with a dimple in the center. The bumps are the size of a pinhead to pencil eraser (2 to 5 millimeters). Most people have a group or line of bumps together. People with a weakened immune system may develop larger bumps in large groups.

The bumps are skin-colored to white, do not hurt, and usually do not itch.

The bumps can appear anywhere on the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.

How did I get molluscum? — The virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact or by contact with a surface that has the virus on it. This means that you can spread the virus:

From one area of the body to another by scratching or touching a bump

From person to person by touching molluscum on another person during contact sports, sexual activity, or other activities

By touching an object with the virus on it, such as a towel or washcloth used by a person with molluscum

The bumps usually appear two to six weeks after you are exposed to the virus. A dermatologist can usually diagnose molluscum based on an exam; a biopsy is not usually necessary.

How do I avoid infecting other people? — If you are sexually active and have molluscum on your penis, vulva, upper inner thighs, buttocks, or skin immediately above the genitals, you should avoid sexual contact until lesions have healed or get treatment so that you do not spread

the virus to others during sex. If you have molluscum on other areas, you can reduce the likelihood of spread to others by covering the bumps during the day with clothing or a bandage.

Do not share towels, washcloths, razors, or other personal equipment. Once the bumps have resolved, you cannot spread the virus to others. However, it is not known if you can get infected again, so it is best not to touch molluscum bumps on other people.

If your child has molluscum and attends daycare or school, try to cover the bumps with a bandage or clothing. Children with molluscum that cannot be covered should avoid wrestling or rough-housing to reduce the risk of spread of the infection to others.

MOLLUSCUM TREATMENT — In healthy people, molluscum usually disappears without treatment within a few months. However, the infection may persist for several months and even up to a year and a half. People with weakened immune systems can develop severe and long-lasting infections. Treatment is recommended in sexually active adolescents and adults to get rid of molluscum on the penis, vulva, skin near the genitals, or buttocks because treatment of these areas can help to prevent the spread of the infection to other people during sex. Treatment for molluscum in children is optional since the molluscum will eventually heal on their own. Reasons why molluscum may be treated include cosmetic concerns or to try to prevent the spread of infection to other body areas, siblings, or playmates.

There are several treatment options for molluscum, which include:

- Freezing the growths (called cryotherapy)
- Scraping off the growths (called curettage)
- A treatment called cantharidin or cantharone, which forms a blister which helps to get rid of the molluscum
- Injecting candida (yeast) in the area to try to build up immunity

No one treatment for molluscum has proven to be the "best." Therefore, treatment usually depends on where the growths are located, your preferences, and the preferences of your healthcare provider. Side effects of treatment can include pain, skin irritation, skin discoloration, and scarring. You should try not to pick or scrape off the bumps yourself because you may cause a bacterial infection of the skin or may accidentally spread the molluscum virus to other areas.