

Molluscum Contagiosum



What is Molluscum?

Molluscum or Mollusca appear as small, smooth bumps on the skin's surface. The bumps may show up anywhere on the body. It is easily spread but is usually not harmful.

What causes Molluscum?

Molluscum is an infection caused by a virus known as Molluscum Contagiosum. The virus affects the outer layer of the skin.

It is commonly spread by touching, scratching or rubbing infected skin. It can also be transmitted through sexual contact. A person with Mollusca can spread it to other parts of their body by touching or scratching a bump and then touching their body somewhere else. Touching an object that has the virus on it, such as a towel, can also spread the infection.

Molluscum is most common in children, especially those younger than age 12, but it can infect anyone. Infection in teenagers and young adults is usually considered a sexually transmitted infection (STI). If the virus is transmitted during sex, the bumps can be found in the pubic area, groin, genitals, buttocks and/or thighs.

What are the symptoms?

Mollusca will begin to appear anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 months after contact with the virus.

Bumps grow over several weeks and will appear as small, raised, and usually white, pink, or flesh-colored with a dimple or pit in the center. They often have a pearly appearance and are smooth and firm.

Mollusca can range in size from about the size of a pinhead to as large as a pencil eraser. They are not painful, but they may become itchy, sore, red, and/or swollen.

Mollusca may appear alone or in groups. Most often Mollusca appear on the trunk, face, eyelids, or genital area.

How do I find out if I have it?

Molluscum is usually diagnosed during a physical examination by your health care provider.

What is the treatment for Molluscum?

In most cases, molluscum contagiosum does not need to be treated. The bumps usually go away on their own in 6 to 9 months. However, in some cases they may last much longer - sometimes even for years.

The infection is contagious until all of the bumps are gone.

If the bumps are in the genital area (on or near the penis, vulva, vagina, or anus), treatment is usually recommended. If you need treatment, your health care provider will help you decide on the best option for you.

Choices for treatment may include:

- freezing the bumps with liquid nitrogen (cryotherapy)
- removing the viral material from inside the bumps (curettage)
- putting a chemical on the bumps (ex: cantharidin or potassium hydrochloride)
- using medicines (liquids or creams), such as those used to treat warts

How can I protect myself?

Anyone who has skin-to-skin contact with an infected person is at risk of getting infected.

To reduce your risk, practice safer sex by using a condom. When used correctly, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. However, it is important to be aware that condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes, genital warts (HPV), and syphilis (when sores are present).

Talk to your partner(s) and/or your health care provider about STIs and how to reduce your risk before having sex.

If you have been diagnosed with molluscum, follow these tips to prevent molluscum from spreading:

- Wash your hands regularly, especially after touching any of the bumps
- Try not to scratch the bumps
- Keep lesions clean and dry
- Cover bumps with a bandage or clothing
- Do not share towels, clothing or personal items with others
- Avoid shaving areas where bumps are present
- If the bumps are in your genital area, avoid sexual contact until the bumps are gone

Remember that the virus lives in the skin and once the lesions are gone, the virus is gone and you can no longer spread the virus to others.