

Molluscum Contagiosum - Guidelines

What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a skin infection that causes small pearly or flesh-colored bumps. The bumps may be clear, and the center often is indented. The infection is caused by a virus. The virus is easily spread but is not harmful.

What are the symptoms?

The bumps are round with a dimple in the center. They are a little smaller in size than the eraser on the end of a pencil. The bumps don't cause pain. They may appear alone or in groups. They most often appear on the trunk, face, eyelids. The bumps may become inflamed and turn red as your body fights the virus.

People who have a weakened immune system may have dozens of larger bumps. These may need special treatment.

How does molluscum contagiosum spread?

The virus commonly spreads through skin-to-skin contact. This includes touching the bumps and then touching the skin. Touching an object that has the virus on it, such as a towel, also can spread the infection. The virus can spread from one part of the body to another. Or it can spread to other people, such as among children at day care or school. The infection is contagious until the bumps are gone.

The time from exposure to the virus until the bumps appear usually is 2 to 7 weeks, but it can take up to 6 months.¹

To prevent molluscum contagiosum from spreading:

- Try not to scratch.
- Put a piece of tape or a bandage over the bumps.
- Do not share towels or washcloths.
- If the bumps are on your face, don't shave.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will do a physical exam and may take a sample of the bumps for testing. **How is it treated?**

In most cases, molluscum contagiosum doesn't need to be treated. The bumps usually go away on their own in 6 to 9 months. But in some cases, they may last much longer—sometimes even for years.

If you need treatment, your choices may include:

- Freezing the bumps, called cryotherapy or cryosurgery.
- Scraping off the bumps, called curettage.
- Using medicines (liquids or creams), such as those used to treat warts.

Children may not need treatment, because molluscum contagiosum usually goes away on its own. But if your child needs treatment, talk to your child's doctor about how to prevent pain and scarring.

Who gets molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is most common in children, especially those younger than age 12.