

MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

Molluscum contagiosum is a viral skin condition that causes raised, round, smooth-surfaced bumps on the skin. They look like thick-walled pimples. The bumps, called molluscum, are usually found on just one area of the body.

The bumps have a waxy or skin-colored surface, may have a dimple in the center, are firm (there is a white material **which is not pus** inside the bumps), and are many different sizes, from pinhead to 1/4 inch across. Children 2 to 12 years old are most likely to be infected by this virus.

How long does it last?

Most molluscum disappear without treatment in 6 to 18 months. Molluscum can spread rapidly and last longer in children who also have eczema (sensitive, dry skin). If repeatedly picked at, molluscum can become infected with bacteria and change into crusty sores (impetigo). Most children develop only 5 to 10 molluscum, but some acquire more. Regardless of the number, they are a temporary condition.

Is treatment a good idea?

Because molluscum are harmless, painless, and have a natural tendency to heal and disappear, in general we recommend not treating them. The treatment itself may be painful and frightening, especially to younger children. In addition, treatment may be unsuccessful or need to be repeated.

There are several treatment options for molluscum, which include:

- Freezing the growths (called cryotherapy)
- Scraping off the growths (curettage)
- A treatment called cantharidin, which forms a blister and gets rid of the molluscum once the blister heals ("blister beetle extract")
- Various medications applied to the molluscum bumps (one example is podophyllotoxin)

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.

Preventing the spread of molluscum to other areas of your child's body:

Every time your child picks at a molluscum and then scratches another area of skin with the same finger, a new site of molluscum can form. To prevent this spread, discourage your child from picking at the molluscum. Chewing or sucking on a molluscum can lead to similar bumps on the lips or face. If your child is doing this, cover the molluscum with a Band-Aid. Keep your child's fingernails cut short and wash your child's hands more frequently.

Molluscum are only mildly contagious to other people. (The incubation period is 4 to 8 weeks.) However, they are easily spread in warm water. Avoid having your child in a bath or hot tub with other children. The affected child should also use separate towels to avoid transmitting the virus that way.

Your child can attend child care, preschool, and school without undue concern about spread. Cases of spread by contact sports and sexual activity have also been reported.

Call us if you are concerned that a molluscum has opened and looks infected, you notice the lesions are spreading rapidly, or you prefer to have them treated by a dermatologist.