



Dermatology Patient Education

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is a common skin infection. Caused by a virus that spreads easily between people, molluscum is usually harmless. It does, however, cause growths that can form anywhere on the skin. These growths appear approximately several weeks to a few months after you come into contact with the virus.

WHAT DOES MOLLUSCUM LOOK LIKE?

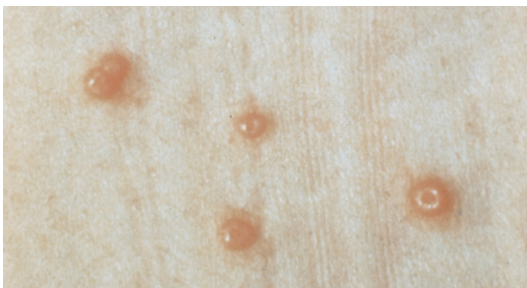
Molluscum growths on the skin can be:

- Small and shiny
- Round or dome-shaped
- White, pink, or flesh-colored
- Dimpled or indented in the center
- Smooth and firm

The growths can become red and swollen. Sometimes, they even feel sore or itch, but this is less common.

In children, the growths commonly occur on the face, trunk, and limbs. In adults, the growths occur on the genital area, lower abdomen, buttocks, and inner thighs.

In people with weakened immune systems, the growths may be very large in size and number, especially on the face.



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WHO GETS MOLLUSCUM?

Anyone exposed to the molluscum virus may develop this disease. However, molluscum contagiosum is a common skin infection in children. Children get it from skin-to-skin contact with other children who have the virus. Children also can be exposed to the virus by sharing toys, playmats or clothing that has touched the virus.

Adults most often get molluscum contagiosum through contact with a towel, gym mat or equipment, or clothing that previously touched a growth on someone's skin. For example, anyone who participates in a close contact sport, such as wrestling, is at a higher risk for molluscum.

Adults can often develop molluscum from sexual contact with an infected person.

Living in a tropical (warm and humid) area also increases your risk for developing molluscum. You also are at a higher risk if you have eczema or a disease that weakens your immune system, such as HIV.

HOW DOES A DERMATOLOGIST DIAGNOSIS MOLLUSCUM?

Your dermatologist will do a visual examination of your growths to determine if they are molluscum. Your dermatologist may also perform a skin biopsy, which is the removal of the entire growth (or a part of it) to look at under a microscope. If you have concerns about underlying health conditions that may be causing your molluscum, talk with your dermatologist.

HOW DOES A DERMATOLOGIST TREAT MOLLUSCUM?

Molluscum contagiosum can clear on its own without leaving scars. Research has shown that in most cases involving children, molluscum clears up on its own between 12 and 18 months.

However, in some cases, treatment can be beneficial. The condition is generally easier to control if treatment starts early, when the first growths appear. Your dermatologist will talk with you about whether or not treatment is appropriate for you.



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Depending on if the dermatologist is treating a child or an adult, treatments available in a dermatologist's office include:

- **Cryosurgery:** This involves freezing the growths.
- **Curettage:** Your dermatologist removes the growth by cutting or scraping (curettage). This can be combined with heat (electrosurgery) to destroy the growth.
- **Laser therapy:** This can be effective for people who have a weakened immune system. If you have many growths, you may need treatment every 3 to 6 weeks until the growths disappear.
- **Topical (applied to the skin) medicine:** Acids or blistering solutions can be effective.

Your dermatologist may also prescribe topical medicine for you to apply to your skin at home:

- **Cimetidine:** An oral medicine that increases your immune system's ability to fight the virus.
- **Imiquimod:** This medicine helps your immune system fight the virus. This is strong medicine. It also is used to treat stubborn warts and some skin cancers.
- **Retinoid or antiviral medicine:** Patients apply this medicine to the bumps as instructed. This medicine can cause skin irritation.

During treatment, some growths may appear as others are fading. This is normal.

Do not purchase molluscum contagiosum treatments online. These can be ineffective, or even harmful. You should see your dermatologist for proper diagnosis and treatment.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MOLLUSCUM FROM SPREADING?

Molluscum contagiosum can spread easily to objects and to other parts of your body. All it takes is rubbing or scratching a growth and then touching an object or unaffected skin.

To prevent spreading the virus:

- Avoid picking and scratching the bumps.

- If you participate in a close contact sport, do not participate until the virus clears.
- Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths or clothing.
- Do not shave skin that has molluscum growths.
- Avoid sexual contact.



Molluscum contagiosum near the eye

WILL MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM COME BACK?

Molluscum will not recur once all the lesions are gone. However, it is possible to become infected again with the virus. A dermatologist is a medical doctor who specializes in treating the medical, surgical and cosmetic conditions of the skin, hair and nails. To learn more about molluscum contagiosum, visit aad.org or call toll free (888) 462-DERM (3376) to find a dermatologist in your area.

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