

Molluscum Contagiosum

General Information

Molluscum contagiosum is a common skin disease caused by a pox virus.

It causes small bumps (known as mollusca) to grow on your skin. The bumps will:

- be small and raised (usually smooth and firm)
- be white, pink or flesh-colored
- have a dimple or pit in the center.

They may be as small as a pinhead or as large as a pencil eraser.

The bumps can grow anywhere on your body. They are not usually painful but can be itchy, red, swollen or sore.

Molluscum contagiosum usually goes away on its own in 6 to 12 months. It is possible for it to take up to 4 years to go away.

Anyone can get this skin disease. It is most common in children ages 1 to 10. You may be at a higher risk if you have a weak immune system.

How You Can Get Molluscum Contagiosum

You can get molluscum contagiosum by:

- touching affected skin
- touching something that has the virus on it, such as a towel, desk or toy
- sexual contact.

The bumps can also be spread to other parts of your body. This may happen if you touch or scratch a bump on one part of your body and then touch another part of your body.

The virus lives only in the top layer of skin. Once the lesions are gone the virus is gone and you cannot spread it to others.

Treatment

Treatment is usually not needed for molluscum contagiosum. You and your health care provider will decide if you need any type of treatment and what is right for you.

Treatment options are: removing the bumps, medicine by mouth, or medicine you put on the bumps.

Prevention

The best thing you can do to avoid getting or spreading molluscum contagiosum is to follow good hygiene habits such as washing your hands often.

- Do not touch, pick or scratch bumps on your own or others' skin.
- Do not share towels, clothing or other personal items.
- Keep the lesions covered with clothing or bandages.
- Do not shave or have any hair removal on areas with bumps.

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- If you have bumps on or near your genital area (penis, vulva, vagina or anus) do not have any sex activities until you see your health care provider.

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have any of the following symptoms:

- unusual skin irritation such as a rash, bump or blister that does not go away
- red and swollen skin
- itchiness
- pain or soreness
- bumps near your genital area (penis, vulva, vagina or anus).

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.