

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is a skin infection caused by a poxvirus. This virus causes lesions (growths) similar to warts which can appear anywhere on the body.

Transmission

Anyone can get molluscum contagiosum but is more common in children (1-10 years of age). It is spread via:

- **Person to person** through close contact.
 - In adults, the majority of cases are caused by sexual contact.
- **Environment to person** through contaminated objects such as towels, pool equipment, and toys.

Risk factors:

- **People with weakened immune systems** (i.e., HIV-infected persons or persons being treated for cancer).
 - Growths may be larger and may be more difficult to treat
- **People with atopic dermatitis** due to frequent breaks in the skin.
 - People with this condition may be more likely to spread this virus to other parts of their body
- **People who live in warm, humid climates** where living conditions are crowded.

It is unknown if past infection makes a person immune.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear between two and seven weeks but may take as long as six months to appear.

Symptoms only affect the top layer of skin and include:

- **Bumps on the skin** that are small white, red, or flesh-colored, and may have a pearly appearance. They are often raised and have a tiny, hard, seed-like center. They are usually smooth and firm.
- **Lesions typically on the trunk**, face, and extremities, rarely covering the entire body.

Diagnosis

The disease is usually diagnosed by the visual appearance of the bumps.

Treatment

Symptoms usually go away without treatment within a few months. Alternatively, there are treatments that may be used, but there is little agreement on effective treatments. Your health care provider may recommend treatment to reduce itching and alleviate discomfort.

- **Physical removal** should be done by a health care provider.
- **Oral therapy** is often used for children because it is less painful and can be done at home.
- **Topical therapy.** Podophyllotoxin cream is a reliable home therapy.
- **Therapy for immunocompromised persons.** Therapies are targeted at boosting the immune system.

Prevention

- **Wash your hands** after touching the bumps.
- **Do not use towels that are used by an infected individual.**

- **Avoid scratching bumps** to prevent the bumps from spreading to another site.
- **Cover lesions with watertight bandages** when lesions cannot be covered by clothing, especially when participating in contact sports or activities while swimming. Bandages should be changed daily or when soiled.

For more information about treatment, visit [Molluscum Contagiosum | Poxvirus | CDC](#) or contact your health care provider.

Exclusion Guidance

Individuals with molluscum contagiosum should not be excluded from work, school or childcare unless the [general exclusions apply](#).

- Athletes participating in close-contact sports, such as wrestling, should cover lesions with dressing followed by under wrap and tape if not covered by clothing.

For additional information about molluscum contagiosum, contact the North Dakota Health and Human Services Public Health Division at 800.427.2180.

Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015, May 11). *CDC Molluscum Contagiosum*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/molluscum-contagiosum/index.html>
2. Kimberlin, D. W., Barnett, E. D., Lynfield, R., Sawyer, M. H. (2021) Red Book: 2021-2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 32nd ed. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Molluscum Contagiosum] [pages 535-537].

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