



Disease Fact Sheet

Molluscum Contagiosum

What is Molluscum Contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a skin infection that is usually mild and benign. The symptoms of the disease include Mollusca, which are lesions (growths) that are white, pink, or flesh colored with a dimple or pit in the center. They are usually smooth and firm, and can range in size from as small as a pin head to as large as a pencil eraser. They can become itchy, red, sore, and/or swollen. These lesions can appear anywhere on the body.

What causes Molluscum Contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by a poxvirus (*molluscum contagiosum virus*).

Is Molluscum Contagiosum serious?

Usually not. Molluscum contagiosum is generally a superficial (only infecting the skin) illness that is self-limiting. It will generally resolve on its own, without treatment, within 6 to 12 months. Sometimes it can take up to 4 years for all of the lesions to disappear.

Is it contagious?

Yes. This infection is able to be spread from one place to another on a person's own body when a person picks or scratches at the lesions, and then touches another area of their body. Molluscum contagiosum can also be spread to other people through physical contact. It can also be spread through objects that become contaminated with the virus such as towels, bathing sponges, clothing, toys, and pool equipment. It is unclear whether the virus can be spread through contact with intact lesions, or if the lesion must be broken to transmit the virus. Therefore, it is important that all lesions, whether they are broken open or not, should be covered.

How soon will someone become ill after being infected?

The usual period of time from infection to the onset of symptoms (the incubation period) is not specific. It is estimated that the incubation period is between 2 weeks and 6 months.

Who is at risk for Molluscum Contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum occurs most often in children between 1 and 10 years of age. However, adults can become infected with the virus, and spread it to others as well.

Other people who are at an increased risk include:

- People who have weakened immune systems, like those with HIV or people being treated for cancer
 - This is because their immune system may have trouble containing the virus, and the lesions may look different, be larger, and be harder to treat
- People who have atopic dermatitis may be at increased risk due to frequent breaks in the skin
- People who live in warm, humid environments where living conditions are crowded
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Where and when does Molluscum Contagiosum occur?

Molluscum contagiosum occurs worldwide, and can occur at any time throughout the year.

How is Molluscum Contagiosum treated?

Because this infection is usually self-limited in healthy people, treatment may not be necessary. However, depending on the location of the lesions, other underlying illnesses, and the desire to prevent transmission, a person may choose therapy. Three treatments for Molluscum contagiosum can be provided by health care providers. One treatment method is the physical removal of lesions by either freezing or cutting them off. Another treatment method is by taking a medicine called cimetidine; however, this method results in the gradual removal of the lesions and may take longer. The final therapy makes use of creams such as podophyllotoxin cream and other types, which are applied directly to the lesions. Please be aware that some treatments available from the internet may not be effective, and may even be harmful. It is best to seek the advice of your health care provider for treatment options.

Can Molluscum Contagiosum be prevented?

Preventive measures include:

- Frequent hand washing
- Keep lesions covered with either clothing, or a watertight bandage
- Do not share towels, clothing, or other personal items including: hair brushes, watches, and bar soap
- Do not shave, or have electrolysis on areas with lesions
- Routine disinfection of toys and shared equipment (such as wrestling mats or kick boards)
 - Disinfect **NON-FOOD Surfaces**
 - Use a solution of **½ cup of bleach** mixed with **1 gallon of water** (Must be made fresh daily)
 - Pre-wash surfaces with soap and water.
 - Then apply sanitizing solution of bleach and water. Let solution remain in contact with surface for **5 minutes**.
 - Then rinse and/or allow to air dry
 - Disinfect **FOOD CONTACT Surfaces**
 - Use a solution of **2 teaspoons bleach** mixed with **1 gallon of water** (Must be made fresh daily)
 - Pre-wash surface with soap and water
 - Then soak in the sanitizing solution of bleach and water.
 - Allow solution to be in contact with surface for at least **2 minutes**.
 - Drain and air dry.

How should Molluscum Contagiosum be handled at school/childcare?

There is no reason to keep a person with Molluscum contagiosum infection home from school/childcare. It is reasonable to inform the parent, and request a note from the physician as Molluscum contagiosum must be diagnosed by a health care provider. Lesions should be kept covered with clothing or watertight bandages at all times. Frequent hand washing should be encouraged.

Sports Activities:

People with Molluscum contagiosum lesions should not take part in contact sports such as wrestling, basketball, and football unless all lesions can be covered with clothing or watertight bandages. Activities that use shared gear like helmets, pads, gloves, and balls should also be avoided unless all lesions can be covered. Swimming should be avoided unless all lesions can be covered with watertight bandages. Personal items such as towels, swimming goggles, and suits should not be shared.