



Health fact sheet: Molluscum contagiosum

What is Molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a viral infection that causes a mild skin rash. The disease is generally mild and should not be a reason for concern or worry. It is not serious and generally clears within 12 – 18 months without treatment.

What are signs and symptoms?

The rash looks like one or more small growths or wart-like bumps (called mollusca) that are usually pink, white or skin colored. Each molluscum starts out as a very small spot about the size of a pinhead and grows over several weeks into a larger bump that might become as large as a pea.

The bumps are usually soft and smooth and may have an indented center. These bumps are filled with a white, waxy pus core that contains the virus, and may have a shiny or “pearly” look. The rate of incidence is highest among five to ten year olds. The mollusca can appear alone as a single bump or in groups, clusters or rows. They can show up almost anywhere on the skin, but in children are most commonly found on the chest, stomach and arms (including the armpits) legs and face. Most individuals develop between 1 and 20 mollusca. They’re usually painless, but can become itchy, red, swollen, sore and infected especially if scratched.

What is the cause?

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by the molluscum contagiosum virus (MCV), a member of the poxvirus family. Infection with MCV occurs when the virus enters a small break in the skins surface. Many people who come into contact with the virus, have immunity against it, and do not develop any growths. For those not resistant to it, growths usually appear 2 to 8 weeks after infection.

How does it spread?

The virus spreads easily, and most commonly through direct skin to skin contact, but also by touching objects that have the virus on them, such as toys, clothing, bedding and towels. Once someone has molluscum contagiosum it can spread from one part of the body to another by scratching or rubbing the bumps and then touching another part of the body.



What is the treatment?

In many cases, molluscum contagiosum is left to go away on its own, without any treatment. Each individual molluscum typically disappears in about 2 – 3 months. However new growths generally appear as old ones are going away, so it usually takes 12 – 18 months (but can take longer) for molluscum contagiosum to disappear completely. Sometimes doctors use treatments to remove growths or help them go more quickly. Treatments have a small risk of skin scarring.

How to prevent?

Molluscum contagiosum is contagious and can spread to other parts of the body, it is therefore advisable to follow these precautions

- Avoid touching, scratching or rubbing growths
- Maintain hand hygiene
- Keep skin clean and moisturized
- Do not share towels or clothes
- Keep it covered

Swimming pool precautions

Swimming should also be avoided unless all lesions can be covered by watertight bandages. Personal items such as towels, goggles, and swim suits should not be shared. Other items and equipment such as kick boards and water toys should be used only when all lesions are covered by clothing or watertight bandages.

Children with molluscum contagiosum can still go to school, participate in sports and play with other children.