

MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

WHAT IS MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM?

Molluscum or Mollusca is an infection caused by a virus called Molluscum Contagiosum. The virus affects the outer layer of the skin.

SYMPTOMS

Mollusca will begin to appear anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 months after contact with the virus.

Bumps grow over several weeks and will appear as small, raised, and usually white, pink, or flesh-colored with a dimple or pit in the center. They often have a pearly appearance and are smooth and firm.

Mollusca can range in size from about the size of a pinhead to as large as a pencil eraser. They are not painful, but they may become itchy, sore, red, and/or swollen.

Mollusca may appear alone or in groups. Most often Mollusca appear on the trunk, face, eyelids, or genital area. The infection is easily spread but is usually not harmful.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

It is commonly spread by touching, scratching, or rubbing infected skin. It can also be transmitted through sexual contact.

A person with Mollusca can spread it to other parts of their body by touching or scratching a bump and then touching their body somewhere else. Touching an object that has the virus on it, such as a towel, can also spread the infection.

Infection in teenagers and young adults is usually considered a sexually transmitted infection (STI). If the virus is transmitted during sex, the bumps can be found in the pubic area, groin, genitals, buttocks and/or thighs.

DIAGNOSIS

Molluscum is usually diagnosed during a physical examination by your health care provider.

TREATMENT

- In most cases, molluscum contagiosum does not need to be treated. The bumps usually go away on their own in 6 to 9 months; however, in some cases they may last much longer - sometimes even for years
- The infection is contagious until all the bumps are gone; if the bumps are in the genital area (on or near the penis, vulva, vagina, or anus), treatment is usually recommended
- Your health care provider may recommend removing the bumps by freezing or scraping or applying prescription creams to the growths
- Molluscum may reoccur and you may need subsequent treatments to ensure all bumps are gone
- Treatment may cause permanent scarring or changes in the colour of the skin
- Scarring may be more noticeable in darker-skinned people

PREVENTION

- Molluscum contagiosum is contracted through skin-to-skin touching
- The best way to prevent it is to avoid sex or skin-to-skin contact with the growths on someone who has molluscum contagiosum

- If you notice growths on yourself or your partner, don't have sex until you get treated or until the growths go away on their own
- If you or your partner have growths on the genitals, treatment is usually the best option, since the bumps can take a long time to clear up
- Avoid touching or sharing clothes and other objects with people you know are infected, until they finish treatment
- Condoms may offer some protection, but they don't protect you from molluscum contagiosum if the virus is on parts of the body that condoms don't cover

If you have been diagnosed with molluscum, follow these instructions to prevent molluscum from spreading:

- Wash your hands regularly, especially after touching any of the bumps
- Try not to scratch the bumps and keep lesions clean and dry
- Cover bumps with a bandage or clothing
- Do not share towels, clothing, or personal items with others
- Avoid shaving areas where bumps are present
- If the bumps are in your genital area, avoid sexual contact until the bumps are gone

The virus lives in the skin and once the lesions are gone, the virus is gone, therefore you can no longer spread the virus to others.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinics **1-800-361-5653, # 1**
- [Planned Parenthood: How can I make sure I don't get or spread molluscum contagiosum?](#)