

Patient Information:

Molluscum Contagiosum Questions and Answers

“What is Molluscum Contagiosum?”

Molluscum Contagiosum is caused by a viral infection of the skin.

Are there signs and symptoms?

Molluscum contagiosum causes bump-like lesions on the skin. The lesions are usually flesh colored to slightly pink to pearly-white, dome-shaped and are usually 2 to 5 mm in size. If closely observed, the center of the lesion is “umbilicated” meaning there is a depression, or belly-button, in the top center. The pubic and genital areas are the most commonly involved areas in adults. However, the lesions can occur anywhere but the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. The lesions are frequently grouped and may be only a few or might cover a wide area.

How can I reduce my risk of contracting molluscum contagiosum?

Follow good general hygiene. It is spread by close contact, skin-to-skin contact or by contact with or sharing of a surface or item with the virus on it. Once a person has the virus, it can be spread to other parts of their body by touching or scratching a lesion or by shaving where lesions are located. However, if the infected person is sexually active then treatment is recommended so that the infection is not passed to the partner.

The CDC includes in their August 15, 2006 web publication titled “Molluscum (Molluscum Contagiosum) Frequently Asked Questions for Everyone” the following statement: “Although the virus might be spread by sharing swimming pools, baths, saunas, or other wet and warm environments, this has not been proven. Researchers who have investigated this idea think it is more likely the virus is spread by sharing towels and other items around a pool or sauna than through water.”

What is the usual treatment?

It is a self-limiting infection, meaning that the lesions usually go away by themselves in a year but could take up to four years. However, since sexually active adults have close skin to skin contact with their partners, treatment is recommended to prevent spread. Again, the lesions are spread by close contact, skin-to-skin contact or by contact with or sharing of a surface or item with the virus on it and a person who already is infected can cause further spread by touching or scratching a lesion or by shaving where lesions are located. Therefore, if you see these lesions try not to touch or scratch them and definitely do not shave in the affected area. When there is risk of direct contact with the lesions, keep them covered to prevent spread. The most common treatments are liquid nitrogen, freezing the lesion, or removing the “core” of the lesion with a needle or blade. It might take several treatments to completely get rid of the lesions. Once the visible lesions are gone, the virus is also gone.

Once my lesions are gone, can I be re-infected?

Yes. The lesions are spread by close contact, skin-to-skin contact or by contact with or sharing of a surface or item with the virus on it. ”