

Molluscum Contagiosum

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is it?

Molluscum is a viral infection of the skin which is transmitted by direct person-to-person contact. It is caused by a benign member of the pox virus family.

What does it look like?

The classic lesions of molluscum contagiosum are painless pearly-white, skin-colored, or pink bumps with a central, whitish core under the skin. They tend to have a pinpoint depression in the center. They can appear anywhere on the body, including face, arms, legs, chest, abdomen, and (in sexually active individuals) the genital area and upper thighs. Lesions are rarely found on the palms and soles. Lesions are usually 2-5mm in diameter and can be found alone or in groups.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made by visualization of its characteristic look. Sometimes a special dermatology magnifying glass is needed to identify it.

How is it treated?

Molluscum will typically resolve on its own within 6-12 months, though it can persist longer. Some individuals choose to allow molluscum to resolve on its own, but for those who are sexually active, removal may prevent lesions from spreading to other areas of the skin or even to partners.

Treatment involves removal of lesions and their contents either by mechanical or chemical means, including:

- Removal with a sharp curette, needle, or forceps
- “Freezing” with liquid nitrogen
- Use of topical medications

The emptying of the contents of the lesion tends to result in its cure. Complete resolution often takes multiple treatments. Have a discussion with your provider to determine if treatment is warranted and which treatment is best.

How to prevent spread?

- Wash your hands.
- Avoid skin to skin contact with an infected individual until all molluscum are treated and cleared.
- Keep lesions covered with clothing or a bandage when around others.
- Keep towels, washcloths, razors, and other personal items for your own use to avoid spread by contact.
- Do not scratch, pick, or shave infected areas as it may spread the virus to other parts of the body or other people.
- Sexual partners of infected students may need to be examined as well.