



# Molluscum Contagiosum

## What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a viral infection of the skin caused by a poxvirus. The virus is easily spread but not harmful.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms can appear anytime from 2 weeks to 6 months after contact with the virus. They begin as tiny painless bumps and grow over several weeks to become small, firm, waxy, pinkish-white, raised lesions, which may have a small crater in the centre of them. The bumps may become swollen and turn red as the body's natural way of fighting the virus.

In children, these symptoms or bumps may appear on the face, body, legs and arms. In adults, these bumps can occur almost anywhere on the body. If the viral infection is sexually transmitted, these symptoms are usually found on the abdomen, groin, external genitals, buttocks or thighs. Molluscum contagiosum is contagious until the bumps are gone.

## How does the infection spread?

The infection can spread from one part of the body to another or to other people. The infection is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, scratching the lesions or bumps, touching objects that have the virus on them, or through sexual contact. In children, the symptoms can be spread to the genital area by scratching.

If you have symptoms, contact your doctor or health care provider. You can also call 811 and speak to a registered nurse.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone who has skin-to-skin contact with an infected person is at risk of getting the infection. While molluscum contagiosum is most common among children under 10 years of age, the infection can affect anyone. In young adults, molluscum contagiosum is primarily a sexually transmitted infection (STI). The infection can be more severe among people with a weaker immune system.

Although it is found throughout the world, molluscum contagiosum is more common in places with warm, humid climates.

## How is it treated?

In some cases, lesions or bumps may persist for years, but they usually go away without treatment in 2 to 6 months. If these symptoms appear around the eyes, they may be treated to prevent irritation. Treatment of symptoms in the genital area will prevent them from spreading to partners through sexual contact.

Home treatment includes trying not to scratch lesions or bumps and using bandages to cover them.

If the symptoms cause concern, or to stop them from spreading, a doctor may use any of the following treatments:

- Cryotherapy – freezing and removing the bumps with liquid nitrogen;
- Curettage – removing the viral material in the centre of the lesion or bump; or
- Medication – applying medication to the lesions or bumps to help them go away.

## Ways to reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection

- The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to a sexually transmitted infection.
- To help protect yourself and your partner(s) from a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use a condom during any vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- Latex and polyurethane male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many sexually transmitted infections including HIV.
- A new condom must be used each time you have sex.

- If a condom breaks, a pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection may occur. If a condom breaks during sex and you are concerned, talk to your health care provider.
- Use only water-based lubricants with male latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex.
- Store latex condoms at room temperature (not too hot and not too cold) and check the expiry date on the condom package.
- Spermicides containing nonoxynol-9 (N-9) may increase the risk of infection/transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and it is not recommended to prevent HIV or these infections.

For more information, see HealthLink BC File [#08o Condoms Help Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\)](#).



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