

# Molluscum contagiosum

## What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a viral infection that affects the outer layer of the skin. The virus causes small, smooth bumps on the skin's surface. These can spread easily but are not harmful.

## What are the symptoms?

A molluscum infection begins as tiny painless bumps that can appear anywhere on the body from 2 weeks to 6 months after contact with the virus. The bumps grow over several weeks to become small, firm, smooth, pinkish-white, raised areas that may have a small pit or crater in the centre of them. The bumps may become swollen and turn red as the body fights the virus.

## How does the infection spread?

A molluscum infection is spread by touching, scratching or rubbing infected skin, including through sexual contact. If the virus is transmitted during sex, the bumps are usually found on the abdomen, groin, external genitals, buttocks or thighs. It can spread from one person to another or from one area of an infected person's body to another. Handling objects that have the virus on them, such as a towel or toys, can also spread the infection.

Molluscum contagiosum is contagious until the bumps are gone. A person infected with the virus should not share towels or face cloths with others. Good hand washing will reduce the chance that the virus will be spread.

## Who can get molluscum contagiosum?

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

The infection can be more severe among people with a weaker immune system.

Molluscum contagiosum is most common in places with warm, humid climates, but it can be found throughout the world.

## How is it treated?

In healthy people, the bumps will usually go away on their own within 6 months. A person with lesions and bumps should try not to scratch them, and may even want to use bandages to cover them. Avoid shaving areas where the bumps are present.

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.

If the symptoms cause concern, or to stop them from spreading, a health care provider 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
- Medication – the use of oral medications and creams to treat molluscum is rare, and should only be done in consultation with a health care provider. These medications can produce unwanted side-effects and are only considered when cryotherapy and curettage do not work

If you have symptoms or questions, contact your health care provider, or call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse.

## How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

### Practice safer sex by using a condom

When used correctly, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes simplex, genital warts (human papillomavirus (HPV)), and syphilis (when sores are present).

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage. Do not use a condom that has been damaged
- Check the expiry date. Do not use a condom that is outdated
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear. Do not use a condom that has been torn
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs, or piercings
- Store condoms at room temperature
- A new condom should be used every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms
- Do not use 2 condoms at once
- 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
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane condoms
- Use only condoms that are made of latex or polyurethane (plastic). Latex condoms and polyurethane condoms are the best types of condoms to use to help prevent pregnancy and STIs. (Animal skin condoms can help prevent pregnancy but don't work as well as latex or polyurethane condoms to prevent STIs.)

## Get vaccinated

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A, B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

## Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners, or have multiple sex partners, getting regularly tested for STIs will tell you if you have an infection. Some people can have an STI and not have any symptoms. Finding and treating an STI reduces the chances of passing infections on to your partner(s).

The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to STIs.

## Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner(s) about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner(s), talk about it with your health care provider or a counselor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner(s), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/partners-communication/talking-to-your-partners>

## Informing partners

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partner(s). This will enable them to make decisions about their health and getting tested.

## For more information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, see [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).



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