

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is a common skin infection in children that is caused by a poxvirus, named *molluscum virus*. It produces harmless, noncancerous growths in the skin's top layers. The disease is spread by direct contact with the skin of an infected person or sharing towels with someone who has the disease. Outbreaks have occasionally been reported in child care centers.

Symptoms

Molluscum contagiosum causes a small number, usually between 2 and 20, of raised, dome-shaped bumps or nodules on the skin. They tend to be very small and flesh-colored or pinkish, with a shiny appearance and an indentation or dimple in their center. They are found most often on the face, trunk, and extremities, but may develop anywhere on the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. They are painless and may last for several months to a few years.

The incubation period varies between 2 and 7 weeks, although it is sometimes much longer (up to 6 months).

When to call the doctor

If you notice bumps or nodules on your child that fit this description, call your child's doctor.

Diagnosis

Your child's doctor can make the diagnosis by visual examination of the bumps. If the diagnosis is unclear, the doctor can perform a skin biopsy or send you to a dermatologist for a biopsy.

Treatment

Most often, molluscum nodules go away on their own without treatment. This means that children with just one or a few widely scattered lesions do not need any special care. However, if you and your child choose, these lumps can be removed by a scraping procedure with a sharp instrument (curette) or by using peeling agents or freezing techniques (with liquid nitrogen). These methods are painful and in very rare situations, there may be scarring after the infection has healed.

Prognosis

A molluscum contagiosum infection tends to go away over a period of several months to years. In children who have suppressed immune systems, the infection can remain or even spread to another part of the body.

Prevention

Keep your youngster from having skin-to-skin contact with another child or adult with molluscum contagiosum lesions.

Source: Adapted from *Immunizations and Infectious Diseases: An Informed Parents Guide* (Copyright © 2006 American Academy of Pediatrics) and updated 2011

From your doctor

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