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INTRODUCTION — Molluscum contagiosum is a common virus that causes a skin infection in children. The virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact or by contact with an object with the virus on it, such as a used towel or washcloth. Symptoms of molluscum include small, skin-colored growths on the skin.

Molluscum contagiosum may take **6 months or longer** to resolve. (Sometimes a few years.) While treatment for molluscum is optional, it may be performed for cosmetic reasons and to prevent spread to new areas on the skin.



MOLLUSCUM SYMPTOMS — The most common symptoms of molluscum include:

- Small, dome-shaped bumps with a dimple in the center. The bumps are the size of a pinhead to pencil eraser (1 to 5 millimeters). Most people have a group or line of bumps together.
- The bumps are skin-colored to white, do not hurt, but may itch.
- The bumps can appear anywhere on the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.



How did I get molluscum? — The virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact or by contact with a surface that has the virus on it. This means that you can spread the virus:

- From one area of the body to another by scratching or touching a bump
- From person to person by touching molluscum on another person during contact sports, sexual activity, or other activities
- By touching an object with the virus on it, such as a towel or washcloth used by a person with molluscum.

The bumps usually appear two to six weeks after you are exposed to the virus.

How do I avoid infecting other people?

- Perform hand hygiene after touching the bumps. Minimize scratching which may lead to spreading to other areas of the body. (autoinoculation)
- Do not share towels, washcloths, razors, or other personal items.
- If your child has molluscum and attends daycare or school, try to cover the bumps with clothing if possible. Molluscum is only mildly contagious and not easily spread to other children. If unable to cover, children **should not** be isolated or excluded from activities.

MOLLUSCUM TREATMENT — Molluscum usually disappears without treatment within a few months. However, it may take **6 months or longer** to resolve. (Sometimes a few years.)

Treatment in children is optional since the lesions will eventually heal on their own. Reasons why molluscum may be treated include cosmetic concerns or to try to prevent the spread of infection to other body areas, siblings, or playmates. However, treatments may involve painful scraping freezing or burning the lesions.

When many lesions are present, **treatment is not advised**.

When only a few lesions are present, manual removal or cryotherapy may prevent further spreading.

There are several treatment options for molluscum, which include:

- Freezing the growths (called cryotherapy)
- Scraping off the growths (called curettage)
- Chemically burning the lesions with cantharidin (Causes blistering)
- A medication called podophyllotoxin, which can be applied to the molluscum bumps, although the safety of podophyllotoxin in young children is not known.

No one treatment for molluscum has proven to be the "best." Therefore, treatment usually depends on where the growths are located, the number of lesions, and your preference. Side effects of treatment can include pain, skin irritation, skin discoloration, and scarring.

You should try not to pick or scrape off the bumps yourself because you may cause a bacterial infection of the skin or may accidentally spread the molluscum virus to other areas.

