

# Molluscum contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is a viral skin infection that causes small bumps on the skin. It is very common in children.

## WHAT ARE MOLLUSCUM?

Molluscum are small, skin-colored or pink bumps. They often have shiny appearance and slightly depressed center. They can occur anywhere on the skin but do not affect the internal organs.

Molluscum are not dangerous but can be bothersome. Some molluscum bumps are itchy or tender. Other children may feel embarrassed about the appearance. Many parents worry about molluscum spreading to new areas of skin or to other children. It is important to remember that while molluscum can be irritating, they do not affect the child's overall health. Molluscum eventually go away on their own after several months to years.

## WHAT CAUSES MOLLUSCUM? HOW ARE MOLLUSCUM SPREAD?

Molluscum are caused by a virus. The virus spreads from person to person through touch. It is often spread by skin-to-skin contact. Molluscum can also spread through sharing towels, clothing, or other personal items with someone who has the virus on their skin.

Molluscum is often spread among siblings, friends, and classmates. Though molluscum is contagious, it is not a reason to keep kids out of school or activities.

After the virus is on the skin, bumps usually appear 2-8 weeks later. Once the bumps appear, they can come and go for many months or years. Scratching or picking the bumps can increase the spread. New bumps can also appear even without picking, since the virus can spread to the surrounding skin.

## WHO GETS MOLLUSCUM?

Molluscum is very common in children. It usually affects healthy children. Molluscum is not a sign of an immune problem in children.

Molluscum is even more common in children with eczema. Children with eczema may also get more molluscum bumps. The molluscum bumps can also irritate the eczema and trigger eczema flare ups.

Molluscum is less common in adults. In adults, molluscum can also be spread through sexual contact. Molluscum is not considered a sexually transmitted infection in children.

## WHAT IF MY CHILD'S MOLLUSCUM LOOK INFECTED?

In some children, the bumps may become red and irritated. You may even see pus bumps resembling pimples. These changes can be a good sign that the immune system is fighting the virus. This can be the first sign that the molluscum may go away soon.

Molluscum can also trigger a surrounding rough itchy rash in some children. This is common in children with dry or sensitive skin.

If you notice spreading redness, warmth, and/or pus, your doctor can examine for signs of infection. Infection of molluscum is rare. Most often, these signs are signs that the immune system is trying to clear the molluscum virus.

## HOW CAN MOLLUSCUM BE TREATED?

There are several options for treating molluscum.

### **NO TREATMENT**

If the bumps are not causing symptoms, many doctors recommend watchful waiting. Molluscum will eventually go away on its own, even with no treatment. This usually takes about 1-2 years, but in some patients may take longer.

### **CANTHARIDIN**

Cantharidin is a liquid medication, which is made from blistering beetles. Cantharidin is available as a single use applicator, which is the only FDA-approved treatment for molluscum. It is approved in patients aged 2 years and older. The medication is applied to each molluscum bump by your health care provider in the office. Cantharidin causes a blister in the skin where it is applied. The medication should be washed off 24 hours after it is applied – sooner if your child has severe blistering, severe pain, or other severe reactions. The spots may itch or be tender for a few days after cantharidin treatment. After the blister heals, the molluscum bump usually resolves.

### **LIQUID NITROGEN**

Liquid nitrogen can be used to freeze molluscum. This is effective, but painful. A blister may form after treatment. Bumps treated with liquid nitrogen may be tender for a few days.

### **CURETTAGE**

Molluscum can also be scraped off the skin by your provider. A curette tool is used to remove the bump. This treatment can also be painful and is typically only considered in older patients.

### **AT HOME TREATMENTS**

Several creams have been tried at home to help molluscum go away sooner. These are not FDA-approved for molluscum, but may be used off label. At home options include retinoids and imiquimod. Both can cause skin irritation to try to help the body's own immune system clear the virus sooner.



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