

Molluscum contagiosum

Overview

Molluscum contagiosum is a harmless, self-limiting viral infection, which is common in childhood but can affect adults.

It causes pearly or cheesy looking bumpy skin lesions that can last months. In most cases, no treatment is required.

It is passed by close contact with an infected person or by sharing baths, bath toys, and towels.

It is unlikely to be passed on through swimming in a chlorinated swimming pool. It can, however, be passed sexually.

Having had molluscum contagiosum in the past doesn't protect you from future infections.

It may take many weeks before an infected person gets the rash.

Cause

The rash is caused by the *Molluscum contagiosum* virus, which is one of a family of viruses called poxviruses. This virus only affects humans and infects the skin.

Symptoms

Molluscum spots are pearly or fleshy round lumps with a distinctive depression or dimple in the centre, which may contain cheesy looking material.

The spots may vary in size from 1mm-2cm and can occur on any, or multiple, parts of the body except the soles of the feet or palms of the hands.

Sometimes the spots are itchy. If the child scratches the spots, they can become infected and may scar. Uninfected spots heal without scarring.

A spot on the eyelid may irritate the eye.

Diagnosis

The distinctive appearance of molluscum contagiosum means that tests are rarely necessary. However, if your doctor is uncertain of the diagnosis, they may scrape some cells away and send them to the lab to be examined under a microscope.

Children who have a poor immune system can have a lot of lesions. If the lesions are widespread or have an atypical appearance, your doctor may investigate the immune system. This is often done in consultation with a specialist paediatrician.

Treatment

Molluscum spots will go away by themselves without treatment, although this can take months and sometimes even years.

If you want your child to be treated, there are several options that all involve "irritating" the spots.

This process encourages the body's own immune system to attack the virus and clear it from the system.

Techniques include:

- Squeezing the cheesy material out of the core, once your doctor has shown you how to

do this.

- Covering the spots with duct tape or the sticky part of an adhesive bandage, leaving it on for two days, then pulling it off.
- Using an irritating solution, such as benzoyl peroxide gel 10%, from the chemist.

These techniques are not to be used near the eyes. Other techniques your doctor may do include:

- Using the wart treatments imiquimod (Aldara) or podophyllin, available on prescription.
- Removing the spots by freezing them with liquid nitrogen.
- Removing the centre with a sterile needle.
- Scraping them with a scalpel, lasering, or using electricity or heat.

Treatment carries a risk of scarring, so the therapy may be worse than the disease. You should discuss the pros and cons of each technique with your doctor.

Never put a steroid cream on a molluscum spot.

Children with molluscum can go to daycare or preschool but should not share towels or baths with other children. Frequent handwashing is another important way of reducing the spread of the virus.

Lifestyle and diet

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by a virus that affects the skin and can be spread through contact so it is best to avoid sharing clothing, towels, bedding or baths with people who have it.

Frequent handwashing is also a good idea to help stop the spread.

The risk of contracting it from a chlorinated swimming pool is very low.

Support & online resources

Support and online resources for molluscum contagiosum include:

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

www.rch.org.au

It'sMyHealth.com.au