

# **MANAGING YOUR MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM**

## **What Is Molluscum Contagiosum?**

Molluscum contagiosum is an infection of the top layers of the skin caused by a virus. It spreads easily and so is fairly common in children (more often boys) and young adults. When it affects the genital area, it's said to be a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

## **What Causes Molluscum Contagiosum?**

The cause is a poxvirus (the same virus family that causes warts). The virus spreads by direct contact, touching either the infected skin of someone else or infected items such as clothes.

## **What Are the Symptoms of Molluscum Contagiosum?**

Usually, people with molluscum contagiosum feel fine and don't have itching, pain, or tender spots. It takes from 2 to 7 weeks after exposure to see the rash. Small bumps occur on the skin in the affected part of the body, often in the face, eyelids, underarms, and thighs (groin). Usually, bumps don't appear on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and mouth.

The bumps are domed with a central pit and contain white curdlike (cheeselike) material. This material contains the virus.

The bumps usually go away on their own over several weeks, but some may last for months. They don't usually leave scars.

## **How Is Molluscum Contagiosum Diagnosed?**

Tests are usually not needed. The health care provider will usually diagnose the infection just by looking at the bumps on the skin. In some cases, the health care provider may want to take a scraping of the bumps and look at it under a microscope.

## How Is Molluscum Contagiosum Treated?

The bumps may go away on their own, but people often have treatment to keep the virus from infecting someone else or to keep the rash from spreading to other body parts. Treatments include removing the bumps by using lasers, freezing, or scraping. Sometimes these treatments leave scars. Special medicated skin creams can also help bumps go away.

Treatment may have to be repeated as new bumps appear. Also, people can get this infection more than once. Sharing contaminated hand towels or other personal items and having close contact with someone who has the infection should be avoided.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Molluscum Contagiosum

- ✓ **DO** avoid sexual contact if the bumps involve the genital area.
- ✓ **DO** keep the affected area clean and covered with clothing or a bandage, to avoid spreading the virus.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if the bumps get worse.
- ⊗ **DON'T** share hand towels with another person until the bumps are gone.
- ⊗ **DON'T** scratch the bumps on your skin and then touch other parts of your body. You will spread the virus this way and may get another (bacterial) infection.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use public swimming pools, saunas, and showers until the bumps are gone, to avoid passing the infection to others.

FROM THE DESK OF

## NOTES

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- American Academy of Dermatology: Tel: (866) 503-SKIN (7546); Website:  
<http://www.aad.org>

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