

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum consists of small, harmless growths caused by a skin virus. They resemble pimples with a waxy, pinkish look and a small central pit. Molluscum are contagious and are spread by direct physical contact. Molluscum occur most often in children. When found in adults the direct contact is usually sexual contact. In normal people the molluscum go away eventually once the body becomes immune to them.

Each molluscum usually spreads onto skin that comes in contact with it. They spread much more extensively in skin that already has eczema or in individuals with weakened immune systems. In healthy individuals each molluscum lesion may last 6-8 weeks. With continuous spreading, however, new lesions appear over time, such that the mean duration is about 8 months, with some infections lasting up to five years. Scarring may occur, particularly if the lesions become infected.

There is no single perfect treatment for molluscum contagiosum, since we are unable to kill the virus. A blistering agent (cantharone or TCA acid) or liquid nitrogen will destroy individual molluscum lesions. Scraping off the bumps using a tool called a curette is a common way to surgically remove them, but an injection of "Novocaine" will be needed for numbing.

New lesions may still form even while the existing ones are being destroyed. New growths should be treated when they become large enough to be seen. A tiny scar may remain when they heal. Candidates for removal include children with lesions on their face (quite common), older kids who are embarrassed by them and won't change for gym class or sports, etc, and younger kids where the molluscum is making control of their eczema difficult. Removal is usually curative but even if some do return, those can be dealt with the same way or left in peace without causing problems in most cases.

Irritating drugs applied just to the little bumps speeds resolution. These drugs include salicylic acid, Retin-A, Aldara cream and Condylox solution. Occasionally the oral drug Griseofulvin seems to clear up molluscum for reasons that are not known. Sometimes a rash appears around the growths when the body starts to reject the virus, and the molluscum lesions become red, itchy or sore. This molluscum will clear without treatment.

For extensive molluscum it is essential to treat the itching and skin dryness. This often requires oral and topical steroid prescriptions and antihistamine medications, and frequent applications of a good moisturizer. Molluscum are contagious, so physical activity should be restricted to avoid transmitting it to others. You can always consider the option of no treatment, as molluscum do eventually clear on their own.