

Molluscum contagiosum is a rash caused by a common virus that often affects school-aged children, but can also occur in adults. 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. Like the name implies, this is a very contagious virus, though the virus does not typically cause “typical” viral symptoms such as fever, nausea/vomiting, loose stools, or cough.

The rash presents as small, usually non-itchy, flesh-colored bumps that resemble warts. Children and those whose immune systems are compromised (i.e. cancer/diabetics/HIV patients, nursing home and elderly patients, organ-transplant recipients, etc.) are at higher risk of getting the rash. The bumps usually appear two to six weeks after you are exposed to the virus. Though it usually resolves on its own without complications after a number of months, sometimes it can take years to resolve. During this time, it may spread to yourself and/or others.

## 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. You can spread the virus:

- From one area of the body to another by scratching or touching a bump
- From person to person by direct contact during contact sports, sexual activity, shaving, or other activities
- By touching an object with the virus on it, such as a towel, washcloth used by a person with molluscum, shaving with a razor that has been in contact with the rash, or even bathing with others that have it.

## How do I avoid infecting other people?

If you are sexually active and have molluscum on your penis, vulva, upper inner thighs, buttocks, or skin immediately above the genitals, you should avoid sexual contact until lesions have healed or treated. In addition, you can reduce the spread to others by covering the bumps with bandages and washing your hands if the bumps are touched. Do not share towels, washcloths, razors, clothes or other personal equipment. Once the bumps have resolved, you are no longer contagious. If your child has molluscum and attends daycare or school, try to cover the bumps. Children with molluscum that cannot be covered should avoid wrestling, direct contact with others, or bathing with others at home.

## How is Molluscum treated?

Treatment depends on quantity and location of the lesions as well as your preferences. Side effects of treatment can include pain, skin irritation and/or discoloration, and possible scarring. Your provider will help formulate a plan for you.

Avoid picking or scratching the lesions to minimize risk of infection as well. While treatment for molluscum is optional, it may be performed for cosmetic reasons and to prevent spread to new areas on the skin.