

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum Contagiosum (MC) is a chronic viral infection of the skin, less common among adults than in children under 12 years of age. It may remain dormant for extended periods of time only to unexpectedly flare up during times of stress, illness, immunocompromised states or unknown reasons. Usually MC skin lesions will present as:

- ❖ raised, round bumps on the skin that look like thick-walled, firm pimples
- ❖ waxy or skin-colored surface on bumps
- ❖ a dimple or indentation in the center of a round, smooth bump
- ❖ on just one area of body
- ❖ many different sizes, from pinhead to 1/4 inch across
- ❖ non-painful, but occasionally itchy.

The diagnosis of MC is usually made by history and physical examination performed by a health professional. In certain situations, however, a biopsy may be recommended to rule out other infectious etiologies which can look like MC and require different treatments. Such situations are more frequent in foreign born persons, those who travel to countries outside the United States and those who are immunocompromised or have HIV infection.

Molluscum is transmitted by skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. Molluscum can spread to other parts of the body if one picks at a bump and then scratches elsewhere (this process is called auto-inoculation) or gets re-infected by an untreated sexual partner. Otherwise, Molluscum is only mildly contagious to other people.

After initial exposure, an incubation period of anywhere from 4 to 8 weeks may pass before skin lesions typically appear. Again, MC may also remain dormant for extended periods of time. If lesions develop, most will disappear without treatment in 6 to 18 months. Molluscum can spread rapidly and last longer in patients who have other chronic skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis as well as those who are immunocompromised or have HIV infection. If repeatedly picked at, however, molluscum can become infected with bacteria and change into crusty sores (impetigo). Historically, most children develop only five to ten molluscum, but some acquire more. In adults, the reports are much more variable. Regardless of the number, they frequently will heal on their own but may recur on occasion.

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