

Molluscum contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by the molluscum contagiosum virus (MCV). It is transmitted by skin-to-skin contact which is usually sexual in adults and non-sexual in children. Towels and other objects might transmit occasional cases. Spots appear one week to six months (usually two to three months) after contact.

Smooth, round, pearly lumps with a central core

Molluscum contagiosum may cause a varied number of lumps – sometimes even 10 or 20 – although this number may be different under different circumstances. The lumps:

- May be located on or around the genitals. This includes the pubic area, the inner thighs and the abdomen.
- Are painless, but may be slightly itchy.
- Often have a tiny central indentation.

Molluscum contagiosum can be mistaken for genital warts or pimples. If you think you have molluscum contagiosum, it is recommended that you see your doctor or other experienced health professional.

Possible complications

Bacterial infections can complicate molluscum contagiosum, causing the lumps to become red and sore. However, these symptoms may also be signs that the lumps are about to disappear naturally. If symptoms don't resolve quickly, consult your doctor, in case you need antibiotic treatment.

Molluscum contagiosum is usually treated with liquid nitrogen

Although molluscum contagiosum eventually resolves, freezing the lumps with liquid nitrogen can shorten the duration of symptoms:

- A single treatment is all that is usually required. However, it may take a couple of weeks for the lumps to disappear.
- Imiquimod cream 0.1% applied three times daily is also effective.

Do not scratch any irritated areas after treatment, as this may spread the infection.

What happens if molluscum contagiosum is not treated?

Molluscum contagiosum is a mild, self-limiting disease. Without treatment, it can persist for six months to two years. However, any one lump will usually clear up in two to three months.

Where to get help

- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9347 0244 or 1800 032 017; TTY (03) 9347 8619
- Your doctor.

Things to remember

- Molluscum contagiosum is a mild, viral skin infection.
- It is characterised by smooth, round, pearly lumps with a central core.
- The infection usually resolves itself, but treatment can shorten the duration of symptoms.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by the Melbourne Sexual health Centre. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria

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