
Molluscum contagiosum

Summary

- Molluscum contagiosum is a mild, harmless viral skin infection.
 - It is common in children and results from close contact with other children who have the infection.
 - Molluscum contagiosum is a sexually transmissible infection (STI) in adults as it can be spread by skin-to-skin contact during sex.
 - It is characterised by small, smooth, round, pearly lumps with a central core.
 - The infection usually resolves itself, but treatment can shorten the length of symptoms.
 - Your sexual partners do not need treatment if they have no symptoms.
 - Testing for other STIs is recommended if you have molluscum contagiosum.
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Molluscum contagiosum is a viral skin infection caused by the molluscum contagiosum virus. It is a sexually transmissible infection (STI) in adults as it can be spread by skin-to-skin contact during sex.

You can also spread the infection around your body by scratching, especially in areas where the skin is broken. Occasionally, molluscum contagiosum can be spread by bathing (bath or pool water), or by touching objects that have the virus on them, such as bath toys, towels, clothing or bedding.

Molluscum contagiosum is common in children and results from close contact with other children who have the infection.

Symptoms of molluscum contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum may cause small lumps or lesions (around 1–5 mm in diameter) to appear on the skin of the thighs, genitals and abdominal area. It usually does not affect other parts of your body.

The lesions:

- are painless, but may be slightly itchy
- often have a tiny central indentation
- can be numerous and cover the thighs, genital and abdominal areas
- will eventually resolve without treatment within a few months (are 'self-limiting').

Diagnosis of molluscum contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum can be mistaken for genital warts or pimples. If you notice any unusual skin lesions, it is recommended that you see your doctor or other experienced health professional for an accurate diagnosis.

There is no test for molluscum contagiosum – it is diagnosed only by the appearance of the lesions. If you have molluscum contagiosum, your health professional may recommend tests for other STIs.

Treatment of molluscum contagiosum

Treatment is available, although molluscum contagiosum will eventually clear up by itself if left untreated. The lesions are usually treated with liquid nitrogen, which freezes them. This helps reduce the length of time that symptoms are present.

Liquid nitrogen treatment:

- is commonly available from your local doctor or sexual health centre
 - is cosmetic and it is not a cure, as the virus remains on the skin until your immune system has got rid of it
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- usually only requires a single treatment. However, it may take a couple of weeks for the lumps to disappear after freezing with liquid nitrogen.

People with suppressed immune systems may take longer for molluscum contagiosum to clear. Sexual partners of a person with molluscum contagiosum do not need treatment if they have no lesions on their body.

Complications of molluscum contagiosum

Bacterial infections can complicate molluscum contagiosum, however, this is rare. To lessen the risk of bacterial infection or the spread of molluscum contagiosum, do not pick, squeeze or irritate the lesions. There is no need to apply creams or lotions, just keep up your usual hygiene practices.

If molluscum contagiosum is not treated

Molluscum contagiosum is a mild, 'self-limiting' skin infection. Without treatment, it can persist for several months, but will eventually resolve. The duration, severity and length of treatment of molluscum contagiosum vary from person to person.

Where to get help

- Your **doctor / GP**
- Your school nurse or school welfare coordinator
- Some secondary schools provide access to an **adolescent health trained GP on site**
- Your local community health service
- **Family Planning Victoria's Action Centre** Tel. **1800 013 952** or **(03)9660 4700** (also is youth friendly)
- **Family Planning Victoria** Tel. **1800 013 952** or **(03) 9257 0100**
- **Melbourne Sexual Health Centre** Tel. **(03) 9341 6200** or **1800 032 017** or TTY (for the hearing impaired) **(03) 9347 8619**
- **Thorne Harbour Health** (formerly Victorian AIDS Council) Tel. **(03) 9865 6700** or **1800 134 840**
- **The Centre Clinic**, St Kilda Tel. **(03) 9525 5866**
- **Equinox Gender Diverse Health Centre** Tel. **(03) 9416 2889**
- **PRONTO!** Tel. **(03) 9416 2889**
- **Ballarat Community Health Sexual Health Clinic** Tel. **(03) 5338 4500**
- **Bendigo Community Health Sexual Health Clinic** Tel. **(03) 5434 4300** Or **(03) 5448 1600**
- **Gateway Health Clinic 35**, Wodonga Tel. **(02) 6022 8888** or **1800657 573**
- **Sunraysia Community Health Services** Tel. **(03) 5022 5444**
- **Barwon Health Sexual Health Clinic** Tel. **(03) 5226 7489**
- **Victorian Supercare Pharmacies**
- **1800MyOptions** Tel:**1800 696784** is a statewide phone service for information about sexual health as well as contraception and pregnancy options

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre

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