Fact Sheet

Molluscum Contagiosum

What is Molluscum Contagiosum?
Molluscum Contagiosum is a virus that causes a mild skin disease characterized by lesions or bumps that can appear anywhere on the body. Within 6 – 12 months, the disease routinely disappears without treatment but can take as long as four years.

How can people be exposed to Molluscum Contagiosum?
Molluscum Contagiosum is spread by direct person-to-person physical contact or by touching an object that has been soiled with the virus. Someone with the disease can spread it to other parts of their body by touching, scratching, and even shaving a bump and then touching other areas. Sharing towels, clothing, bathing sponges, and toys can spread the disease to others as well. Once the lesions are gone, the virus is gone and it can no longer be spread.

Who is most at risk for infection?
Molluscum Contagiosum is most common in children 1 to 10 years of age. People with weakened immune systems (HIV infected persons or persons being treated for cancer) are at a higher risk. Those with atopic dermatitis may also be at a higher risk of the disease as well as those who live in warm, humid climates where living conditions are crowded can also increase a risk for infection.

What are the signs of Molluscum Contagiosum infection?
Lesions are small, raised, and usually white, pink, or flesh-colored with a dimple or pit in the center. They are usually smooth and firm and range from about the size of a pinhead to a pencil eraser (2 to 5 millimeters in diameter). They may become itchy, sore, red, and/or swollen.

How do I know if I was exposed to Molluscum Contagiosum?
Unless you are told that you have been exposed you may not know you have been exposed until the bumps occur.

What is the treatment for Molluscum Contagiosum infection?
Treatment may not be needed in a healthy person but they can decrease infecting other persons. There are treatments that your doctor can prescribe that can help to remove the bumps from your body faster.

How can I reduce the spread of Molluscum Contagiosum?
1. Keeping your hands clean is the best way to stop the spread.
2. Avoid direct skin-to-skin contact with those infected.
3. Do not pick or scratch at the bumps.
4. Keep the bumps covered with a watertight bandage when around others or with children picking at lesions. Change daily or when soiled.
5. Do not share towels, clothing, or other personal items that can have the Molluscum germs on them from an infected person.

6. Being careful during sports activities:
   a. If you are infected, do not participate in any contact sports such as wrestling, basketball, or football unless all lesions can be covered by clothing or bandages.
   b. Avoid sharing sports gear like helmets, gloves, and balls unless lesions are completely covered.
   c. Avoid swimming while lesions are present unless all lesions are covered by a watertight bandage.

7. Day Care Centers, Schools, and Employers:
   a. There is no reason for an infected person to be excluded from a class or job if bumps can be covered appropriately.
   b. Lesions and bumps should be diagnosed by a healthcare professional as not all bumps may be Molluscum Contagiosum.
   c. Routine disinfection of shared equipment (toys, kick boards, wrestling mats) will decrease further spread.

How do I get more information on Molluscum Contagiosum?
Calhoun County Public Health Department
Phone: 269-969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)
Website: www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/molluscum-contagiosum/index.html
Spanish:

Molluscum Cantagiosum
Updated 1/17/19

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor’s orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.