



Molluscum contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is a common skin infection that is caused by a virus. It most commonly affects children 1 to 10 years of age and young adults.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

A poxvirus, molluscum contagiosum virus (MCV).

Symptoms

Small, pale, shiny, dome-shaped bumps on the skin, often with a characteristic dimple on the top. The bumps may be flesh-colored, white, translucent, or pink. The bumps are usually painless, but on rare occasions can be itchy, red, swollen, or sore. In children, the bumps occur on the face, body, arms, or legs. Bumps may last longer and cover more of the body in people with eczema (skin disease) or those who have a weakened immune system.

Spread

Spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. It can also be spread by contact with contaminated objects and surfaces such as shared clothes, towels, wash cloths, gym or pool equipment, and wrestling mats.

Persons with molluscum contagiosum can accidentally spread the virus to other parts of their body. This can occur by touching or scratching the bumps and then touching another part of the body (autoinoculation).

Although the virus might be spread by sharing swimming pools, baths, saunas, etc., this has not been proven. Researchers who have investigated this idea think it is more likely that the virus is spread by sharing towels and other items around a pool or sauna rather than through water.

Incubation

Typically, it takes 2 to 7 weeks from when a person is exposed until symptoms develop. However, it could take up to 6 months.

Contagious period

The contagious period is unknown. People can spread the infection until the soft white core comes out of the center of their bumps. After that, the bumps will begin to heal and the risk of spreading the infections will be very low. In general, contagiousness is low and reinfection is possible, but not common.

Molluscum contagiosum

Exclusion

Childcare and school

None. Encourage parents/guardians to cover bumps with clothing when there is a possibility that others will come in contact with the skin. If not covered by clothing, cover with a bandage.

During activities

Exclude any child with bumps that cannot be covered with a watertight bandage from participating in swimming or other contact sports.

Diagnosis

Recommend that parents/guardians call their health care provider.

Treatment

MCV infection is self-limited for healthy individuals and treatment is typically not necessary. Infection usually resolves on its own after 6 to 12 months but may last for a few years. However, treatment options should be discussed with a health care provider. Treatment options typically involve physical removal (most rapid and effective means), oral therapy, or topical therapy.

Prevention

- Discourage children from touching, picking, or scratching skin with bumps or blisters. This may cause further spread of the virus to another area of the body.
- Have parents/guardians change bandage daily or when obviously soiled.
- Use disposable medical gloves if bandage is changed at the childcare or school. Dispose of used bandages and gloves in the trash.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after touching the bumps or discarding bandages. Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.
- For school sports with body contact or shared equipment, require bumps be covered with clothing or a watertight bandage.
- Do not allow children to share towels, wash cloths, uniforms, clothing, or other personal items.
- Do not allow sharing of sports equipment or pool equipment. Provide individual kick boards and other pool equipment.
- Clean and disinfect any surfaces or equipment thoroughly that may have been contaminated (see Section 2).

Molluscum contagiosum

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

Hennepin County Public Health
Epidemiology
612-543-5230
epi-envhlth@hennepin.us

Updated April 2024

