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Molluscum Contagiosum

What is molluscum?

Molluscum is a common skin infection caused by a virus.

What are the symptoms?

The molluscum virus produces small, flesh-colored, harmless bumps on the skin, often with a tiny indented center. They can develop anywhere on the body but are most commonly found on the face, trunk and extremities. Sometimes the bumps can trigger eczema, local dryness or itching of the skin. The bumps do not usually hurt.

How is it spread?

Molluscum is spread by direct contact with the skin of an infected person or contact with a surface or object (like a towel) that has the virus on it. The bumps are only mildly contagious. Children with molluscum do not need to be excluded from daycare, school, sports, or swimming pools. Practice good hand hygiene after touching the bumps.

How is it treated?

Molluscum usually resolves on its own, without complications, after a number of months to a few years. In some cases, treatments may be used to get rid of the bumps. The treatment may involve scraping, burning, freezing or chemically damaging the bumps. These methods are painful and may scar. Bumps should not be picked or scraped due to risk of infection or spreading the virus. One home treatment that seems to work well is apple cider vinegar. It can be applied once a day to intact (not open, scratched or red bumps—that will sting) bumps. Soak a small piece of cotton with the cider vinegar, put it on top of the bump and cover the cider-soaked cotton with a bandage. Alternatively, you can make a cider vinegar bath! Just apply one cup of cider vinegar to bath water and submerge nightly for 10 minutes or so. Cold compresses can also be applied to itchy or irritated bumps.

How can it be prevented?

Within reason, try to prevent skin-to-skin contact with someone who has molluscum. Often in a household, only one child will get molluscum. We suspect other family members have been exposed to the virus, but for reasons we don't understand, only some people get the bumps.

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