

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

because you or your child may have been exposed to molluscum contagiosum.

If you believe your child has developed molluscum contagiosum, contact your health care provider. Notify your child care provider or preschool if a diagnosis of molluscum contagiosum is made.

for informational purposes only.

What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a common skin infection caused by a virus that infects the top layer of skin. Humans are the only known source of this virus.

What are the symptoms of molluscum contagiosum?

Symptoms of illness appear 2 weeks to 6 months after an individual is exposed to the virus. The appearance of small lesions (bumps) on the skin is the primary symptom of molluscum contagiosum. The lesions are usually flesh-colored, white, pink, or clear, with a dimple in the center. They can be as small as a pinhead to as large as a pencil eraser tip. Lesions may occur anywhere on the body, and most often appear on the face, abdomen, arms, legs, or genital area. The lesions are usually painless, but sometimes they can itch and become inflamed. They usually resolve in 6-12 months, but sometimes take longer.

How is molluscum contagiosum spread?

The virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact with someone who has these lesions. It can also be spread by sharing personal items such as towels and blankets.

Who is at risk for molluscum contagiosum?

It is possible for any person to get the virus, although not exclusive to children it is most common in children ages 1 to 10 years. People who commonly have more direct skin contact with others (such as children in schools or child cares) may be at an increased risk of getting the virus.

How is molluscum contagiosum diagnosed?

A health care provider can usually diagnose with visual examination. It can also be diagnosed by looking at cell samples under a microscope.

How is molluscum contagiosum treated?

The lesions are usually self-limiting and will disappear without scarring unless they are scratched at. Complete disappearance of all lesions generally occurs within 6 to 12 months, but can take up to 4 years. Children with scattered lesions, or a single lesion, need not be treated. Persons with many lesions can have the lesions physically removed by a doctor; other options include oral medications or topical therapies.

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Child Care Health Outreach Program

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How is the spread of molluscum contagiosum reduced?

- Avoid direct skin contact with someone who has the virus.
- Avoid the sharing of personal items such as towels and clothing.
- Practice good handwashing.
- Prevent children from scratching or picking at the lesions.
- A cold compress applied to the lesion may help alleviate the feeling of being itchy.
- Keep molluscum lesions clean, dry, and covered with clothing or a bandage whenever possible.

Exclude from group setting?

Children with this illness do not need to be excluded from school or child care.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 4th ed.

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Red Book: 2018-2021 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases, 31st ed.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Website)

- Molluscum Contagiosum. Accessed December 2020.

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