

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum Contagiosum is a viral skin infection (pox family) that causes raised, pearl-like papules or nodules on the skin. It is a common infection in children often seen on the face, neck, armpit, arms, and hands.

Typically, the lesion of molluscum begins as a small, painless papule that may become raised up to a pearly, flesh-colored nodule. The papule often has a dimple in the center. The skin lesion commonly has a central core or plug of white, cheesy or waxy material.

The papules are about 2–5 millimeters wide. There is usually no inflammation and subsequently no redness unless there is trauma or a secondary infection. Scratching or other irritation may cause the virus to spread in a line or in groups, called crops. Typically there are a small number of lesions, usually between 2 and 20.

Molluscum lesions are mildly contagious and most often spread to other areas of the infected child's body instead of spreading to other children.

The virus can spread to others through direct contact with a lesion and contaminated objects, such as towels, clothing, or toys.

The period of communicability is unknown but once the lesions are gone, the individual is no longer contagious. Lesions may persist from a few months to a few years. In healthy individuals, these lesions ultimately disappear without scarring, unless there is excessive scratching, which may leave marks. Individual lesions usually disappear within about 2–3 months. Complete disappearance of all lesions generally occurs within about 6–18 months. The infection may persist and show rapid progression in immunosuppressed people.

Refer to licensed health care provider if there are symptoms suggestive of Molluscum Contagiosum. Because Molluscum Contagiosum is self-limited in healthy individuals, treatment may be unnecessary.

If possible, keep the area with growths clean and covered with clothing or a bandage to minimize risk of direct contact.

Inform students that scratching or picking the lesions can spread it to other parts of the body. In some cases, covering the lesions with a bandage may help stop scratching and spread of the virus.