

700 Children's Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43205-2696
nationwidechildrens.org

MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

Molluscum are smooth, pearly, skin-colored bumps on the skin. They are caused by a virus. They begin as small bumps and they may grow as large as a pencil eraser. Many have a pit in the middle where the virus lives.

Molluscum is a common infection in children. The bumps can appear on the face, neck, armpit, arms and hands. In fact, they can be anywhere on the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. The bumps are usually found in lines or groups where the child has scratched.

The virus is easily passed from child to child by touching the bumps. Most often it is spread when young children have frequent skin-to-skin contact with others. This is common among brothers and sisters or children in group care. The virus can also be spread by sharing an infected object such as a towel or clothing.

CARE AT HOME

The bumps can last from a few months to a few years. They will usually go away by themselves. They can be itchy, and when scratched they can spread and become infected. To keep your child more comfortable and also prevent the spread of this infection:

- Avoid sharing towels, bed linens and clothing.
- Teach your child to carefully wash his hands, paying special attention to the fingernails. (Refer to the Helping Hand: *Hand Hygiene*, HH-IV-80.)
- Give acetaminophen (such as Tempra® or Tylenol®) to make your child more comfortable. Be sure to follow the instructions on the bottle.
- Be sure to keep the areas that are infected clean and dry.

CHILD CARE OR SCHOOL

- Children do not need to be kept away from child care or school.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as clothing or towels.
- Remind your child about careful handwashing while at school or child care to prevent the spread of infection.
- Molluscum can be loosely covered with a band-aid to reduce scratching, person-to-person spread, and further irritation.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your child's doctor if:

- You think an infection has formed (redness, oozing or drainage with odor; feels hot to the touch).
- The infection seems to be spreading over a large part of the body.



Picture 1 The bumps may be loosely covered with a band-aid.

TREATMENT

In healthy children, the virus usually goes away on its own within a few months to a few years. However, in more severe cases, a doctor may treat the bumps to keep the virus from spreading further on the child or to other people. Types of treatment include medicine that is put on the bumps, medicine, liquid nitrogen treatment, and curettage (removing the growths).

- **Medicines** – There are different types of liquid medicines that can be put directly on the molluscum with a Q-tip. Usually a small blister forms in a few hours. The medicine is then washed off. After the blister bursts, a scab forms. When the scab falls off, the bump should be gone. This treatment does not hurt the child. It is used carefully on the face and in skin creases. Sometimes there is no blistering at all. However if the child's skin is very sensitive, there may be a lot of blistering. The blisters are uncomfortable, but they are not very deep and go away within a few days. If there are a lot of molluscum, the doctor may prescribe medicine to be taken by mouth for several weeks.
- **Liquid nitrogen** – Freezing with liquid nitrogen is another form of treatment. Liquid nitrogen is put on with a cotton applicator. It feels hot for a moment, and then may form a blister at the site. See the Helping Hand: *Warts: Liquid Nitrogen Treatment*, HH-I-156.
- **Curettage** – Your child's doctor may decide to remove molluscum by scraping the bump or removing the center. This is done only after numbing the area with a special cream. All these treatments cause some discomfort. Sometimes more than one treatment is needed.

FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENT

The doctor will probably want to see your child again in a few weeks. More than one treatment may be needed. If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.