

# FACT SHEET: MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

December 2023

## What is Molluscum Contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum (MC) is an infection of the superficial skin layers caused by a poxvirus (molluscum contagiosum virus). The infection is benign and characterized by lesions (growths) that can appear anywhere on the body. The infection typically resolves without scarring within 6-12 months but may take as long as 3 to 4 years.

## Who gets Molluscum Contagiosum?

Anyone can get MC, however the disease is more often seen in children. Individuals who are immunocompromised may develop an increased number of lesions than normally seen.

## Who is at risk for infection?

People with weakened immune systems such as HIV-infected persons or persons being treated for cancer) are at higher risk for getting the disease. Although not limited to children, it is most common in children 1 to 10 years of age. People who live in warm, humid climates where living conditions are crowded may be at risk of getting MC. Patients with atopic dermatitis are also at risk due to frequent breaks in the skin and they are more likely to spread MC to other parts of their body.

## What are the symptoms of Molluscum Contagiosum?

A person with MC has a smooth and firm lesion on the skin. The lesions, known as Mollusca, are small, raised, and usually white, pink, or flesh-colored with dimple or pit in the center. They often have a pearly appearance and Mollusca may occur anywhere on the body including the face, neck, arms, legs, abdomen, and genital area, alone or in groups. They may become itchy, sore, red, and/or swollen. Lesions are rarely found on the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet.

## How is Molluscum Contagiosum spread?

The virus that causes MC spreads through direct skin-to-skin contact, including sexual contact and through handling objects contaminated with virus (towels, swimming pools kick boards). Infections have been observed in individuals who have recently undergone tattooing or cosmetic hair removal. Transmission of MC to newborns through the birth canal can cause a circular formation of lesions on the scalp of the infant. It is suspected that an infected person can spread the viral infection from one

body part to another by scratching or touching the lesions. When this occurs, it is called autoinoculation. Spread has also occurred by sharing items such as towels.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can appear from 2 weeks to 6 months following exposure, but usually between 2 and 7 weeks.

## Is a person with Molluscum Contagiosum contagious?

Yes. The length of time a person is contagious is unknown. Children are infectious as long as they have molluscum contagiosum lesions. When the lesions are gone, the virus is gone, and people cannot spread it to others.

## How is Molluscum Contagiosum treated?

Treatment is unnecessary in most healthy people since this infection is self-limited and typically disappears spontaneously over a 6-to-12-month period. MC can resolve spontaneously or be treated by removing the lesions.

## Should a person with Molluscum Contagiosum be excluded from work or school?

No, it is not necessary to exclude a person with this disease from school or work. However, children with visible lesions should be excluded from close contact sports such as wrestling, football, and basketball unless the lesions are covered with bandages or clothing.

## Can Molluscum Contagiosum be prevented?

Any child with new bumps or lesions should wash their hands frequently after touching the bumps. All lesions should be covered with clothing and /or a watertight bandage to avoid transmission to other children and /or other areas of uninfected skin. Parents should recognize that MC is a benign skin infection and should seek medical attention for their children if he/she develops any new lesions.

## Want more information?

Information about MC and other related health topics can be found at the website [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit [dchealth.dc.gov](https://dchealth.dc.gov) or call (844) 493-2652.