



Molluscum Contagiosum



Changi
General Hospital

SingHealth

What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a common non-cancerous skin growth caused by a viral infection in the top layers of the skin.

They are similar to warts, but are caused by a different virus. The name molluscum contagiosum implies that the virus and the growths are easily spread by skin contact.

The virus that causes molluscum contagiosum belongs to a family of viruses called poxviruses. This virus can enter through small breaks in the skin or hair follicles and can lead to the development of molluscum lesions. It does not affect any internal organs.

What does molluscum look like?

Molluscum are usually small flesh-coloured or pink dome-shaped growths. They may appear shiny and have a small indentation in the center.

Molluscums are often found in clusters on the skin of the chest, abdomen, arms, groin or buttocks. They can also involve the face and eyelids. Because they can be spread by skin-to-skin contact, molluscum are usually found in areas of the skin that touch each other such as folds in the arms or in the groin.

Often the molluscum may become red or inflamed. This tends to occur just before the lesions resolve spontaneously. Sometimes, the dermatologists may scrape some cells from the lesion and look at them under the microscope to confirm the diagnosis of molluscum. For people with diseases of the immune system, the molluscum may be very large and may involve the face.

How do you get molluscum?

The molluscum virus is transmitted from the skin of one person who has these growths to the skin of another person. Molluscum can also be sexually transmitted if present in the genital area. It is also possible, but less likely to acquire the molluscum virus from non-living objects. Molluscum may spread between children in swimming pools.

Why are some people more likely to get molluscum than others?

People who are exposed to the molluscum virus through skin-to-skin contact have an increased risk of developing these lesions. It is common in young children who have not yet developed immunity to the virus.

Children tend to get molluscum more often than adults. Molluscum also seems to be more common in tropical climates as warmth and humidity tend to favour the growth of the virus. People with HIV infections are more susceptible to acquiring molluscum.

Does molluscum need to be treated?

Many dermatologists advise treating molluscum because they spread. However, molluscum will eventually go away on its own without leaving a scar. As the growths easily spread from one area of the skin to another, some growths may appear as others are going away. It can take from six months to five years for all the lesions to go away on its own. They may be more persistent in people with a weakened immune system.

How do dermatologists treat molluscum?

Molluscum can be treated with liquid nitrogen, with an electric needle (electrocautery), scraped off (curettage) or with off-label use of topical agents such as tretinoin and imiquimod. Less commonly, laser has been used to treat stubborn lesions. Scarring risks as well as some discomfort may be associated with these treatments.

Often, these procedures are reserved for older children and adults. If there are many growths, multiple treatment sessions may be needed every three to six weeks until the growths go away. Another option, especially for young children, is to await spontaneous resolution.

Will the molluscum come back after treatment?

It is possible for a person's skin to get infected again with the molluscum virus. The condition may be easier to control when there are only a few growths. The fewer the growths, the higher the chance of stopping the spread.

Is there any research on molluscum?

New drugs are being developed to treat viral infections. Molluscum infection in patients with HIV infections has improved with the use of certain antiviral drugs. If new and effective antiviral drugs can be developed in a topical form, perhaps they may be of benefit in the future.

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