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## 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 the molluscum lesions. It does not affect any internal organs.

### What Do Molluscum Look Like?

Molluscum are usually small flesh-colored or pink dome-shaped growths. They may appear shiny and have a small indentation in the center. Molluscum are often found in clusters on the skin of the chest, abdomen, arms, groin or buttock. 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 skin that touch each other such as the folds in the arm or in the groin. Often the molluscum may become red or inflamed. This tends to occur just before the growth is ready to go away on its own. Sometimes, the dermatologist might scrape some cells from the lesion and look at these under the microscope to confirm the diagnosis of molluscum. In people with diseases of the immune system, the molluscum may be very large in size 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 occur most often in cases where skin-to-skin contact is frequent. They often occur in young children, especially among siblings. Molluscum can also be sexually transmitted if

growths are present in the genital area. It is also possible, but less likely to acquire the molluscum virus from non-living objects. Molluscum may be spread between children in swimming pools.

## **Why Do Some People Get Molluscum And Others Don't?**

People that are exposed more often 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 than adults do. Molluscum also seems to be more common in tropical climates as warmth and humidity tend to favor the growth of the virus.

## **Do Molluscum Need To Be Treated?**

Many dermatologists advise treating molluscum because they spread. However, molluscum will eventually go away on their own without leaving a scar. Because the growths are easily spread from one area of the skin to another, some growths may appear as others are going away. It may take from 6 months up to 5 years for all of the molluscum to go away on their own.

## **How Do Dermatologists Treat Molluscum?**

Molluscum are treated in the same ways that warts are treated:

- No Treatment: Especially in young children, not treating and to wait for the growths to go away on their own.
- Liquid Nitrogen: They can be frozen with liquid nitrogen.
- Electrocautery: Treated with an electric needle.
- Scraping: Scraped off with a sharp instrument (curette).
- Laser: Laser therapy has been found to be effective in treating molluscum.

Some discomfort is associated with freezing, scraping, electrocautery and laser therapy. Often these procedures are reserved for older children and adults. If there are many growths, multiple treatment sessions may be needed every 3 to 6 weeks until the growths are gone.

## **What If The Molluscum Come Back After Treatment?**

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

This information should not be used as substitute for the medical care and advice of your child's physician. Health related topics found on the Andorra Pediatrics web site should not be used for diagnosing purposes or be substituted for medical advice. As with any new or ongoing treatment, always consult your professional healthcare provider before making any changes in treatment or beginning any new treatment. If you have any questions or concerns, please call our office.