

Molluscum Contagiosum

SYMPTOMS

Molluscum contagiosum is a superficial skin infection. The virus invades the skin causing the appearance of firm, flesh-colored, doughnut-shaped bumps, about 2-5 mm in diameter. Their sunken centers contain a white, curdy-type material. The bumps can occur almost anywhere on the body including the buttocks, thighs and external genitalia. The bumps often remain unchanged for many months, after which they disappear.

CAUSE

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by a virus belonging to the poxvirus family. Close physical contact is usually necessary for transmission; indirect transmission from shared towels, swimming pools, etc., may also be responsible for infection. The incubation period varies from several weeks to several months. Shaving or scratching may cause the infection to spread.

COMPLICATIONS

If scratched, the bumps can become infected with bacteria.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is based on the typical appearance of the bumps. No diagnostic test for this virus is available.

TREATMENT

Avoid shaving infected areas. Treatment is done for aesthetic reasons and to prevent spread of the virus. The goal of treatment is to remove the soft center, after which the bump goes away. Your health care provider may use a curette (sharp, spoon-shaped instrument) to remove the centers. Freezing the lesion with liquid nitrogen or nitrous oxide is an alternative treatment.

RISKS OF TREATMENT

There is a slight risk of minimal scarring. Observe for signs of infection that include redness, swelling, pus-like drainage, or increased soreness at the site.

References:

Uphold, C., and Graham, M. (1998). Clinical Guidelines in Family Practice (3rd edition). Barmarrere Books.