

What is Molluscum Contagiosum?

A skin disease caused by a virus, somewhat similar to warts.

What are the signs or symptoms?

Small, flesh-colored bumps on the skin, often with a tiny, hard, indented, seed-like center

What are the incubation and contagious periods?

- Incubation period: Usually between 2 and 7 weeks, but may be as long as 6 months
- Contagious period: Unknown

How is it spread?

- Person-to-person through close contact
- Through sharing of inanimate objects such as towels

How do you control it?

- Wash hands using good hand-washing technique after touching the bumps.
- Do not share towels.
- Do not scratch the bumps, because that may cause further spread of the virus to another site (autoinoculation).
- Usually goes away on its own in a few months as the person develops antibodies to the virus.
- Alternatively, treatments may be used; however, there is little agreement on effective treatments.
- Although molluscum contagiosum bumps represent a viral infection, they are very mildly contagious and most often are spread to other areas of the affected child's body, rather than to other children. Molluscum contagiosum bumps do not need to be covered like shingles or other oozing sores. Treatment is a personal choice and not an infection control issue for group care setting.

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What are the roles of the caregiver/teacher and the family?

- Wash hands using good hand-washing technique after touching the bumps.
- Do not let children pick at the bumps, because this may cause an opening in the skin, which promotes bacterial infection or further spread of the viral infection.

Exclude from group setting? Not necessary.

Comments

This infection can be itchy and spread by children who scratch the bumps and then touch other surfaces and people. This type of itch can be nearly eliminated by applying a cold compress. Instead of telling children not to scratch, keep a small plastic bag of ice in the freezer with a paper towel to wrap around the ice. Give the wrapped ice bag to children to apply to any area that feels itchy.

The information contained in this publication should not be use as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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