

Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum contagiosum is a skin infection caused by a pox virus and can occur anywhere on the skin. It is very common in children. It is less common in adults and is usually spread through sexual contact. In this case, infections usually occur on the stomach, genital area, buttocks, and thighs.

Molluscum can be treated and often goes away on its own. It is a common infection in British Columbia.

Causes

Molluscum can be passed through vaginal, oral, and anal sexual contact. This includes both penetrative sex and sexual activities where there is skin-to-skin contact. The virus can also live on clothing, towels or surfaces such as toys. Scratching or shaving the area where molluscum are can cause them to spread. If you have molluscum, you can pass it to others even if you don't have symptoms.

Symptoms

Molluscum will most likely show up 2 weeks to 6 months after contact with the virus. Molluscum begin as small painless bumps, which get larger over several weeks and become firm, raised, pinkish-white bumps with a small dip in the centre.

Tests and Diagnosis

Testing and diagnosis for molluscum is done with a clinical exam. A health care provider will look at the bumps to determine what they are. It is best to get tested for molluscum if you have symptoms.

Treatment

You can choose if you want to treat your molluscum. In most cases, the bumps will go away without treatment within 6 months, though they may go away sooner with treatment. Molluscum can be treated by a health care provider and one treatment is often all you need. Talk to your health care provider to find the best treatment option for you.

Sexual Partners

It is your choice if you want to talk to your current sexual partners about molluscum. Telling your partners lets them make informed choices. However, you may not want to or you may not feel safe telling your partners. You need to make the decision that is best for you.

Current partners can check themselves regularly for molluscum and visit their health care provider if they notice any symptoms. Once the molluscum bumps have disappeared, it's less likely that the virus can be passed to partners.

Complications

Molluscum do not usually cause any other health problems. Sometimes, the bumps can become irritated, red and infected. If this happens, see a health care provider to find out if you need antibiotics to prevent scarring. In some people with serious immune problems, molluscum may appear on the face and increase in number, even with treatment.

Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you.

Resources

HealthLink BC – Information about molluscum contagiosum in multiple languages
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/molluscum-contagiosum>

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about molluscum contagiosum
<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information
<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>