

Molluscum contagiosum

What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a viral infection that affects the outer layer of the skin. The virus causes small, smooth bumps on the skin's surface. These bumps can spread easily but are usually not harmful.

What are the symptoms?

A molluscum infection begins as tiny painless bumps that can appear anywhere on the body from 2 weeks to 6 months after contact with the virus. The bumps grow over several weeks to become small, firm, smooth, pinkish-white, raised areas that may have a small pit or crater in the centre of them. The bumps may become red and swollen as the body fights the virus.

How does the infection spread?

A molluscum infection spreads by touching, scratching or rubbing infected skin. It can also spread through sexual contact. This includes sexual activities that involve penetration or direct skin-to-skin contact. If the virus is transmitted during sex, the bumps are usually found on the abdomen, groin, external genitals, buttocks or thighs. It can spread from one person to another or from one area of an infected person's body to another. Handling objects that have the virus on them, like a towel or toys, can also spread the infection.

Molluscum contagiosum is contagious until the bumps are gone. If you have the virus, do not share towels or face cloths with others. Good hand washing will reduce the chances of spreading the virus.

Who can get molluscum contagiosum?

Anyone who has skin-to-skin contact with an infected person is at risk of getting infected.

While molluscum contagiosum is most common among children under 10 years of age, the infection can affect anyone. In adults, molluscum contagiosum is primarily a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI). The infection can be more severe among people with a weaker immune system. Having it once does not protect you from getting it again.

Molluscum contagiosum is most common in places with warm, humid climates, but it can be found throughout the world.

How is it treated?

In healthy people, the bumps will usually go away on their own within 6 months. Try not to scratch the lesions and bumps and may even want to use bandages to cover them. Avoid shaving areas where the bumps are present.

If symptoms appear around the eyes, they may be treated to prevent irritation. Treatment of symptoms in the genital area will prevent them from spreading to partners through sexual contact.

If the symptoms cause concern or to stop them from spreading, a health care provider may use any of the following treatments:

- Cryotherapy – freezing and removing the bumps with liquid nitrogen
- Curettage – removing the viral material in the centre of the lesion or bump
- Medication – the use of oral medications and creams to treat molluscum is rare and should only be done in consultation with a health care provider. These medications can cause unwanted side effects and are only considered when cryotherapy and curettage do not work

If you have symptoms or questions, contact your health care provider or call [8-1-1](tel:8-1-1) to speak with a registered nurse.

How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Practice safer sex by using a condom

When used correctly, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at preventing STIs spread by skin-to-skin contact like herpes simplex, genital warts (human papillomavirus (HPV) and syphilis (when sores are present).

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage. Do not use damaged condoms
- Check the expiry date. Do not use outdated condoms
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear. Do not use torn condoms
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects like rings, studs or piercings
- Store condoms at room temperature
- Use a new condom every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms
- Do not use 2 condoms at once
- Certain vaginal medications, like yeast infection treatments, can reduce the effectiveness of latex condoms. Treatments containing estrogen are particularly likely to damage latex condoms
- Use only water-based lubricants with male latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, like petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil can weaken and destroy latex
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane condoms
- Use condoms made of latex or polyurethane (plastic)

- Latex or polyurethane condoms work the best to help prevent pregnancy and STIs (Animal skin condoms do not work as well as latex or polyurethane condoms to prevent STIs)

Practice safer sex by using dental dams or other barriers

A dental dam is a piece of thin latex that is placed over the vagina/internal genitals or anus during oral sex. It can also be called a latex barrier/sheet, latex dam, oral dam or sheet. Dental dams are a good way to lower the chance of getting or passing sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Important things to remember when using dental dams:

- Before you use the dam, hold it up to light and check for holes
- Rinse it gently with warm water to remove any powder
- Hold the dam over the vagina/internal genitals or anus
- Be sure that only one side of the dam touches the vagina/internal genitals or anus
- Use a new dam each time you have oral sex
- Use a different dam for the anal area and the vagina/internal genital area
- Use lubricant on the vagina/internal genitals or anus to improve sensation
- Dispose of the dam in the garbage can

Medications

There are medications that can lower your chances of getting or passing on certain STIs. For more information, visit [HealthLinkBC File #080 Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

Get vaccinated

Some STIs like hepatitis A, hepatitis B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners or have more than one sex partner, get tested for STIs often. Testing for STIs will confirm if you have an infection. Some people can have an STI and not have any symptoms. Finding and treating an STI reduces the chances of passing infections on to your partner(s).

Having more partners increases your risk of being exposed to STIs.

Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner(s) about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner(s), talk about it with your health care provider or a counsellor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner(s), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/partners-communication/talking-to-your-partners>.

Informing partner

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partner(s). This will let them make informed decisions about their health and getting tested.

For more information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, visit [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority