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Molluscum contagiosum

What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a common viral skin infection. It most often affects infants and young children but adults may also be infected.

Molluscum contagiosum presents as clusters of small round bumps (papules) especially in the warm moist places such as the armpit, groin or behind the knees. They range in size from 1 to 6 mm and may be white, pink or brown. They often have a waxy, pinkish look with a small central pit (umbilicated). As they resolve, they may become inflamed, crusted or scabby. There may be few or hundreds of spots on one individual.

Molluscum contagiosum is a harmless virus but it may persist for months or occasionally for a couple of years. It frequently induces a type of [dermatitis](#) in the affected areas, which are dry, pink and itchy. Molluscum contagiosum may rarely leave tiny pit-like scars.

Molluscum contagiosum



Koebnerised molluscum

How do you catch molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum can be spread from person to person (especially children) by direct skin contact. This appears to be more likely in wet conditions, such as when children bathe or swim together. Sexual transmission is possible in adults.

Lesions tend to be more numerous and last longer in children who also have [atopic eczema](#). It can be very extensive and troublesome in patients with [human immunodeficiency virus](#) infection.

Molluscum contagiosum may arise in areas that have been injured, often because they've been scratched. The papules form a row; this is known as koebnerised molluscum.

Treatment

There is no single perfect treatment of molluscum contagiosum since we are currently unable to kill the virus. The soft white core can be squeezed out of individual lesions. In many cases no specific treatment is necessary.

Medical treatments include:

- Minor [surgery](#), [curettage](#) (topical anaesthetic cream may be applied first) or laser ablation
- [Cryotherapy](#)
- [Cantharidine](#)
- [Imiquimod cream](#)
- Wart paints containing [salicylic acid](#) or [podophyllin](#)

The dermatitis may be treated with hydrocortisone cream, but is unlikely to fully resolve until the infection has cleared up.

Related information

On DermNet NZ:

- [Viral skin infections](#)

Other websites:

- [Molluscum contagiosum](#) - emedicine dermatology, the on-line medical textbook.

Books about skin diseases:

See the [DermNet NZ bookstore](#)

DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.

If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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