

Department of Genitourinary Medicine

Patient Information

The Information Standard 

Information

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Molluscum Contagiosum

Molluscum Contagiosum is a common harmless viral infection of the skin. It causes smooth, flesh coloured lumps which are passed on by direct skin to skin contact, and can affect any part of the body.

What causes Molluscum Contagiosum?

Molluscum Contagiosum is due to a virus infection. It is transmitted by skin contact, and can therefore be passed on through any close physical or sexual contact. It is most commonly seen in children and young adults.

The virus has a long incubation period, and it can take up to 3 months between being infected and the lesions appearing.

What are the symptoms of Molluscum Contagiosum?

The infection causes small white or flesh coloured lumps on the skin, which grow up to 5mm in size. They are usually smooth and doughnut shaped; the middle core contains a waxy substance which is very infectious.

They can appear anywhere on the body, but are common in the genital area, lower abdomen or thighs when transmitted by sexual contact.

They are not usually sore or itchy unless they are scratched and become inflamed.

How is it diagnosed?

An experienced doctor or nurse will be able to diagnose Molluscum Contagiosum just by the appearance of the lesions. They are sometimes mistaken for warts.

As they can be transmitted through sexual contact, you may be advised to have a check-up for other sexually transmitted infections during your clinic visit.

Are there any complications?

The infection itself is completely harmless, and treatment is offered for cosmetic reasons only. The lesions usually resolve on their own without any treatment in a few months so a policy of 'watchful waiting' is usually advised.

In people with poor immunity, such as advanced HIV infection, the infection can spread widely, with lesions appearing on the face. This can be unsightly and distressing.

General advice

- Avoid shaving/waxing the genital region to prevent further spread
- Avoid squeezing lesions as this may cause further infection to the skin and spread of lesions
- Avoid sharing towels/clothes
- Condoms may reduce transmission of lesions but this is not absolute

Treatment options

- No treatment is an option (watchful waiting) as lesions will clear spontaneously
- The lesions may be frozen off. This can sometimes cause scarring, and would not be recommended on the face or in children.
- Creams can be used if advised by the healthcare team.

Further Information

Department of Genitourinary Medicine
The Park Centre for Sexual Health
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To book an appointment, please call: 01305 762 682