

Molluscum contagiosum

Description

Molluscum contagiosum is a common viral infection.

It appears as small firm lumps with white waxy centres, called papules. These can appear anywhere on the body such as arms, legs, trunk, face, thighs, lower abdomen or genital area. They also commonly appear in warm moist places such as the armpit.

How does it spread

Molluscum contagiosum is spread by close skin-to-skin contact. It may also be possible for it to be transmitted via clothing or towels, and it can be spread from one part of the body to another by scratching. **Transmission may be more likely in wet conditions**, e.g. when children bathe or swim together.

Infectious period

Whilst there are skin papules present, affected children and adults can continue to attend Early Childhood Centres and School.

Exclusion period

Children with molluscum contagiosum do not require exclusion.

If a person with molluscum is going swimming, they should:

- Cover all visible lesions (those not covered by swimwear) with watertight bandages
- Not share towels, kick boards, toys or other equipment.

Symptoms

Molluscum contagiosum presents as clusters of small round papules. The papules range in size from 1mm to 6mm and may be white, pink or brown. They often have a waxy, shiny look with a small central pit.

There may be few or hundreds of papules on one individual. They mostly arise in warm moist places, such as the armpit, behind the knees, groin or genital areas. They can arise on the lips or, rarely, inside the mouth. They do not occur on palms or soles. (DermNet) The papules can be present for up to 2 years.

Molluscum is usually painless but can sometimes be itchy, especially if the papules get infected.



Images: <https://dermnetnz.org/topics/molluscum-contagiosum>

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Responsibilities of Early Childhood Education Service

- Discourage child from scratching and encourage regular hand washing
- Ensure visible lesions are covered with clothing or water tight bandages
- Do not share towels, clothing, cloths, etc.

Responsibilities of parents

- Ensure visible lesions are covered with clothing or water tight bandages
- Keep nails short and clean to minimise risk associated with scratching and potential skin infections

Treatment

In many cases no specific treatment is necessary, and symptoms will self resolve. Diagnosis that the papules are molluscum contagiosum should be made by GP. Treatment is usually for cosmetic reasons and can be discussed with GP.

Links/references

- <https://dermnetnz.org/topics/molluscum-contagiosum>
- <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/m/molluscum-contagiosum-viral-skin-infection/>