



# Health Matters

SDSU Student Health Services

Sexual Health

## Molluscum Contagiosum

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### Description

Molluscum Contagiosum is a benign (non-cancerous) virus caused by a member of the pox-virus family. It is a disease of the skin (usually torso and genitals). Lesions begin as small bumps and may be grouped together. They develop into smooth, pearly to flesh-colored, dome-shaped nodules. The lesions often have a centrally depressed center with a white core and a mildly reddened base. Lesions are frequently in the groin, on the buttocks, along the inner thigh and in the pubic area. The lesions appear two to seven weeks after exposure. The lesions are typically painless but may itch or feel tender to the touch. This symptom is harmless and can be ignored.

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### Diagnosis

A diagnosis is made by a medical provider identifying the distinctive clinical appearance of the lesions, by a lab smear of the core, or by biopsy.

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### Treatment

Since the condition may go away on its own and the lesions usually heal without scarring, treatment is not mandatory but is very desirable because it is contagious. Removal of the lesions, when necessary, is done effectively and relatively pain-free with a sharp curette or with liquid nitrogen. More than one treatment may be necessary due to the development of new lesions.

*Cryosurgery* is the freezing of the bumps, usually by the application of liquid nitrogen.

*Curettage* is removing the bumps with a small, sterile scalpel.

*Salicylic acid (Occlusal)* can be applied each day to the bumps.

*Cantharadin* can be applied to the skin.

Post-treatment discomfort is common. There is also a small risk of scarring, discoloration of the skin, local nerve injury, and infection.

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### Prognosis

Most cases resolve spontaneously in six to nine months without scarring, but some may persist for up to four years (the average is two years). You can transmit the virus throughout the time you have symptoms.

People with immune deficiency (i.e., HIV infection) may have a harder time clearing the infection.

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### Prevention

Transmission of molluscum contagiosum can be greatly reduced by avoiding direct skin contact with infected partners until lesions have cleared. For those individuals who choose to be sexually active, using condoms during every sexual encounter will decrease risk of infection. Condoms provide protection from the infected area. Spermicides may also provide some protection against this infection.

Taking precautions cannot eliminate risks, but can certainly decrease them.

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### Things to Know

It is reasonable to conclude that the virus spreads by direct skin to skin contact but the exact mechanism is unknown. Some examples of non-sexual contact include transmission through swimming pools and between wrestlers. Genital lesions in adults are thought to be sexually transmitted.

In mild climates, the head, eyelids, trunk and genitalia are most often affected. In tropical climates, the extremities are affected.

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### For More Information:

Student Health Services. . . . . 619-594-5281

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Visit Our Website at . . . . .shs.sdsu.edu

American Social Health Association (ASHA) National STD Hotline. . . . . 800-227-8922

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