

Molluscum

Editor's note: I asked Dr. Berg to write something about this common skin condition just before the pandemic hit. So it's been sitting on the shelf since while COVID took center stage. It feels nice to be able to talk about some non-COVID stuff again!

by Erica Berg, MD



Molluscum contagiosum is a common skin infection in children that is caused by a poxvirus. (*Varicella*, or what we often call *chickenpox*, is not in this class of viruses.) It produces harmless, non-cancerous growths (*mollusca*) in the skin's top layers. The disease is spread by direct contact with the skin of an infected person, or by sharing their towels, etc. So if a child scratches one of their own *molluscum* growths, then accidentally scratches another child, the virus transfers. Molluscum is most common between the ages of one and ten years. It is quite unusual over age ten.

Molluscum contagiosum causes dome-shaped bumps (nodules) on the skin. They tend to be very small, shiny, and flesh to pinkish color. They are raised with an indentation or dimple in their center. They are found most often on the face, trunk, arms, or legs. But *molluscum* may grow anywhere on the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. They are painless and may last for several months to a few years. The most common length of time is 18 months! Most kids get between 2 and 20 of these growths.

Warts are also skin virus growths, but wart medications will **not** work for *molluscum*. Molluscum nodules go away on their own without treatment most of the time. This means that most children with just a few scattered growths do not need any special care. If it is driving you and your child crazy, and it's been "forever", a dermatologist can remove them. Options are a scraping procedure with a sharp instrument (*curette*), using peeling agents (such as *cantharidin*), or freezing techniques (*liquid nitrogen*). These methods may be painful and can cause scarring on rare occasions. If you let molluscum go away on its own, there will be no scarring. ***Pediatricians and Dermatologists agree that no treatment is best most of the time!***

It is not a good idea to try and remove lesions or the fluid inside of lesions yourself. You may unintentionally spread it to other parts of the body or risk spreading it to others. Scratching or scraping the skin could cause a bacterial infection on top of the molluscum.

Bottom line? There's not much you need to do about it. Try to keep your child from scratching the area because that can cause new ones to crop up. Then the waiting game for it to go away starts over. If a *molluscum* growth looks more red and swollen, call us or schedule a *TeleVisit*.

If you have any concerns about your child's *molluscum* at any time, of course we are here to examine it. We can tell you if it's looking a little worse as it is healing, or if it has become infected.