

Molluscum Contagiosum

What is it?

Molluscum contagiosum (mull-ESS-kum kun-tay-gee-OSS-um) is a virus that causes bumps on the skin. These bumps are called “molluscum.” They are smooth, pearly and can be pink, white or about the same color as the skin. They begin as small bumps and may grow as large as a pencil eraser. Molluscum can be itchy. The skin around the bumps may become red, dry and scaly. It is uncommon for the bumps to become infected. The bumps could last as little as a few weeks to as long as two years. Usually, they go away by themselves.

How is it passed?

Molluscum may be passed from child to child. This happens by direct (skin to skin) contact or by sharing towels or washcloths.

How is it treated?

Molluscum will usually go away on their own. But sometimes it is best to remove them so they will not spread, and to prevent itchiness or irritation. Treatment depends on your child’s age and the size and location of the growths.

Liquid nitrogen

Liquid nitrogen is a common treatment. It “freezes” the part of the skin with a bump on it. Then, a scab or crust will form that should fall off by itself, along with the bump, in 1 to 3 weeks. Molluscum bumps often need a series of repeat treatments. Liquid nitrogen can cause mild pain or a burning feeling while the molluscum is being frozen. After treatment the skin may become swollen and red, and it may blister.

No special care is usually needed after liquid nitrogen treatment. It is OK to wash the skin as usual. If clothing irritates the area or if the blister breaks and the skin is open, put a small amount of antibiotic ointment (bacitracin or polysporin) and cover it with a small band-aid. Use this medicine only if recommend by your healthcare provider.

What can I expect after treatment?

Your child might get dark or light spots where the bumps are treated. Most of the time, these go away without doing anything. After the bumps go away with treatment or on their own, your child might still have small “pock marks” or scars. These might be permanent, or they might fade as time goes on.

To Learn More

- Dermatology
206-987-2158
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Seattle Children’s offers free interpreter services for patients, family members and legal representatives who are Deaf or hard of hearing or speak a language other than English. Seattle Children’s will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your healthcare provider.

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