

Molluscum is a skin disease that can be easily transmitted by skin-to-skin or sexual contact. Condoms can help but will not always cover the infected skin.

Molluscum contagiosum

Last updated 25 March 2011

What is molluscum?

Molluscum is a mild skin disease caused by a pox virus. It affects the top layers of the skin and does not harm any internal organs. Molluscum can affect children and young adults.

What are the symptoms?

Molluscum causes small raised, round lumps on the skin. The lumps may be shiny and have a dimple in the centre. In adults, the lumps often appear around the genitals. These lumps are sometimes mistaken for warts. The lumps can appear between one week and six months after infection, but it is more normal to take about two to three months. Some people never develop symptoms.

How is it transmitted?

It is transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact, which can be sexual or non-sexual (for example, playing contact sport, hugging).

How is it prevented?

Do not have sex with someone who has visible lumps or sores on or near the genitals. Genital lumps or sores could be due to molluscum or another infection.

Using condoms and water based lubricant can significantly reduce the risk of transmission but they will not always cover the infected area. Avoid other direct skin-to-skin contact with anyone who has molluscum lumps.

Go for a regular sexually transmissible infection (STI) check-up to find infections before complications develop and to prevent transmission to others. Always use condoms.

How is it diagnosed?

Molluscum is diagnosed by examination of the skin by a doctor or nurse. The inner core of the lesion can be removed and sent to a laboratory if there is any doubt.

How is it treated?

A doctor can treat the lumps by freezing called cryotherapy, or the core of the lump can be removed. Most people with a small number of lumps do not need treatment because the lumps eventually disappear on their own, although this can take a long time and the lumps remain infectious while they are there.

Telling partners

Previous sexual partners do not need to be notified. However, current sexual partners should be advised to see a doctor or nurse for a check up if they have any unexplained lumps.

The information in this fact sheet is general and you should see a doctor if you are worried about your health.

Contact

NSW Sexual Health Infoline freecall **1800 451 624**.