WHAT IS IT?
Molluscum is a common skin infection caused by the *molluscum contagiosum* virus. The infection results in small bumps that can appear anywhere on the body. Lesions typically resolve on their own without scarring in 6-12 months.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?
Molluscum is spread by skin-to-skin contact and through contaminated objects:
- The virus can be spread from one part of the body to another by scratching or touching the bumps. It is unclear whether the infection can be spread by intact lesions or if exposure to the firm, cheesy core inside the bump is required.
- Molluscum is considered to be a sexually transmitted infection (STI) if lesions are found in the genital area of sexually active individuals.
- Transmission can also occur through contaminated items, such as clothing, towels, bath sponges, razors, toys, pool equipment, etc.
- The virus might be spread by sharing swimming pools, baths, and other warm & wet environments. However, this is unproven, and it is more likely that the virus is spread by sharing items used in these environments.

The molluscum virus cannot be transmitted once all the bumps have resolved. The virus only infects the top layers of the skin, so once the bumps are gone, the virus is gone.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?
Molluscum appears as a pearly-white or flesh-colored bump with a central indentation that resembles a belly button. Lesions can be found anywhere on the body, however they rarely appear on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet.
- It usually takes 2-6 weeks for bumps to develop following exposure to the virus.
- The lesions begin as small, pinpoint elevations that can grow to 2-5 millimeters in diameter.
- The bumps are usually painless but can be itchy. At times, the bumps can become red and irritated. The skin may also become dry and scaly.
- Molluscum lesions usually disappear on their own within several months. However, symptoms may last as long as 5 years without treatment.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?
No special testing is required. Molluscum is diagnosed based on the characteristic appearance of the lesion. Sometimes, molluscum is mistaken for an irritated hair follicle. However, no hair shaft protrudes from the central area of a molluscum lesion.

If molluscum is found in the genital area, screening for other STIs is strongly recommended.

HOW IS IT TREATED?
Though molluscum does not cause serious problems, it is usually treated to prevent further spread of the infection on your body and to other people.

Treatment is recommended in all sexually active individuals who have bumps on their penis, vaginal area, or buttocks. If you have lesions in these areas, avoid sexual contact until you are evaluated and treated by a medical provider.
Treatment Options
■ **Cryotherapy** is the most commonly used form of treatment. Liquid nitrogen is used to freeze the lesions, which kills the virus in the core.
  - More than one treatment is usually necessary. Because the virus is easily spread by skin-to-skin contact, additional bumps may develop while others are resolving.
  - Most lesions heal quickly, and infection is rare. **If you notice redness, tenderness, or drainage in the area treated, return to the clinic for evaluation.**

■ **Alternative treatments** include topical trichloroacetic acid, a blistering solution called cantharidin, electrocautery (treatment with an electric needle), curettage (scraping with a sharp instrument), and laser therapy.

■ **Referral to a dermatologist** may be recommended if a large number of lesions are present.

**HOW DO I KEEP IT FROM SPREADING?**
The best way to avoid getting molluscum and to prevent it from spreading is to **wash your hands well!**

Other preventive measures include the following:
  - **Avoid touching the bumps. Do not pick at or try to scrape off the bumps yourself.** You are likely to spread the lesions or cause a bacterial infection of the skin.
  - **Avoid shaving** in the area where the bumps are located.
  - **Cover lesions** with clothing or a bandage to prevent spread to others.
  - **Avoid sharing personal care items** like towels, razors, bar soap, hair brushes, etc.
  - **Avoid contact sports** like wrestling, football, and basketball unless all lesions are covered. Do not share helmets, baseball gloves, etc.
  - **Avoid swimming unless** lesions can be covered by watertight bandages. Do not share goggles, bathing suits, etc.
  - **Avoid sexual contact** if you have lesions in the genital area. Once lesions are resolved, limit the number of sexual partners and use protection consistently.

**RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**
- [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)