MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

WHAT IS IT?
Molluscum Contagiosum is a common skin infection that causes flesh-colored bumps. It is caused by the molluscum contagiosum virus, which is a member of the poxvirus family. This virus only infects the top layers of the skin. The bumps can appear anywhere on the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?
Molluscum is spread by skin-to-skin contact:
- The virus can be spread from one part of the body to another by scratching or touching the bumps.
- Molluscum is considered to be a sexually transmitted infection if lesions are found in the genital area of sexually active individuals.
- Transmission can occur through contact sports and by sharing personal items, such as towels and razors.
- Molluscum has also been associated with swimming pool use.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?
Molluscum appears as a pearly-white or flesh-colored bump with a central indentation that resembles a belly button. The bumps are usually painless but can be itchy.
- 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.
- At times, molluscum lesions can become red and irritated. The skin may also become dry and scaly.
- If opened, the bumps contain a cheesy, firm core. It is this core material that spreads the virus. The virus cannot be transmitted once all the bumps have resolved.

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

HOW IS IT TREATED?
The bumps caused by molluscum usually disappear on their own within a few months. However, symptoms may last as long as 5 years without treatment.

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.

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.
  - Following treatment, avoid touching the site.
  - 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.
Treatment Options (continued):
• 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.
• Prescription creams, such as Aldara or Retin-A, may also help.
• Referral to a dermatologist may be recommended if a large number of lesions are present.

Self-Care Measures
• Do not pick at or try to scrape off the bumps yourself. You are likely to spread the bumps or cause a bacterial infection of the skin.
• Avoid shaving in the area where the bumps are located. You can spread the infection further by shaving.
• Cover bumps with clothing or a bandage.
• Use a watertight bandage when swimming.

HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?
• Avoid skin contact with infected individuals.
• Limit your number of sexual partners, and use protection.
• Avoid sharing towels, razors, and other personal items.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:
• www.aad.org
• www.cdc.gov