



Treating Molluscum

Molluscum contagiosum is a wart-like skin infection:

- Caused by a virus that affects children much more than adults; does not affect pets
- Creates bumps that usually appear within 6 weeks of contact
- Caught by touching similar bumps on another person or by sharing a bathtub or towel
- Spreads by rubbing or scratching; unlikely to spread in a swimming pool
- Does not spread to internal organs, even in people with low immunity

Molluscum infections ALWAYS go away without treatment.

The infection usually runs its course after 6-12 months, but rarely can last up to 5 years. A single bump can last 3 weeks to 3 months. Once the bumps disappear, they will not return. Similar to chicken pox, becoming immune as a child protects against more complicated infection as an adult.

Children with sensitive skin are more likely to have prolonged or widespread molluscum.

The infection can cause itching. Bumps may swell up, become red, or scabbed over. Surrounding skin can form rashes, a condition called "molluscum eczema." These symptoms mean the infection is almost gone. Molluscum can leave fine scars, which usually fade away within a year.

There are several ways to treat molluscum. None are FDA-approved or proven to be more effective than no treatment. The best choice is the one your child can tolerate.

- **Control itch:** Use cream containing pramoxine (ex: Aveeno Anti-Itch Cream, Prax Lotion).
- **Prevent spread:** Take showers rather than soaking in a bathtub. Apply Liquid Band Aid or nail polish to any new or lasting bumps.
- **Kill skin cells containing the virus:** Burn, freeze or scrape off bumps. Most children do not tolerate these procedures. Other treatments applied only in the doctor's office include: **cantharidin** (can cause blisters) or **silver nitrate** (can cause black spots).
- **Cimetidine** (Tagamet) is an oral medication available in pill or liquid form most effective for children with sensitive skin or prolonged infection. It works best if taken at a high dose 3 times a day and usually requires 3-6 months of treatment.
- Prescription creams, **imiquimod** (Aldara) or **tretinoin** (Retin A), are expensive and not very effective.
- Be cautious before trying over-the-counter products. Many claims made about products sold on the Internet are not proven (ex: www.molluscum.com).