Molluscum

Causes and treatments

What are molluscum?
Molluscum are smooth, pearl-like, flesh-colored skin growths that are caused by a virus. They begin as small bumps and may grow as large as a pencil eraser. Many have a central pit where the virus bodies live.

Usually, molluscum grow on the skin, but they may also form in the mouth or on the eye. Molluscum can be itchy, and the skin around the growths may become red, dry, scaly, or infected. The bumps go away by themselves, but they can last from 2 weeks to 18 months.

Molluscum are common in children, and they may be passed from child to child by direct contact. In adults, they are also sometimes passed from one partner to the other during sex.

How are molluscum treated?
Although molluscum will go away over time, they spread easily and may become infected, itchy, or irritated. Sometimes, people who have them are self-conscious about the way they look. For these reasons, they are often removed. The treatment to remove them depends on the age of the patient and the size and location of the growths.

All forms of treatment may cause some discomfort, which is usually eased by acetaminophen (Tylenol).

Cantharone
Cantharone is a topical gel or liquid that is made from a type of beetle. It is applied to the molluscum with a wooden applicator. It causes a blister to form, usually within a few hours.

After the blister forms, the Cantharone is washed off. When the scab from the blister falls off in 1 or 2 weeks, the growth is gone.

Treatment with Catharone is often preferred because it is not painful. It is used very carefully, and usually on growths on the face and in skin creases.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Dermatology Center:
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Rarely, no blistering occurs. Sometimes, a person’s skin is quite sensitive and a lot of blistering occurs. The blisters are uncomfortable, but they are not deep and they go away within a few days.

To treat any blisters that form:

- Break them with a sterile needle
  - Or:
  - Apply compresses soaked in lukewarm water

**Liquid Nitrogen**

Freezing with liquid nitrogen is another form of treatment for molluscum. Liquid nitrogen is dabbed on with a cotton applicator or sprayed on. It burns for a moment, then the area is achy for a few hours to a day. After that, a blister may form, or there may be a bump that is irritated and red for a few days. The bump or blister should fall off in 1 or 2 weeks.

**Scraping**

Another way to remove molluscum is by scraping the bump to remove the center where the virus lives. The area is usually numbed first with a special cream or with a local anesthetic that is applied with a needle.