

Molluscum contagiosum

What are the aims of this leaflet?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about molluscum contagiosum. It will tell you what it is, what causes it, what can be done about it, and where you can find out more about it.

What is molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a common and relatively harmless viral infection of the skin. As its name implies, it is contagious (can be caught from another person by direct contact). It is most common in children and young adults, but can occur at any age.

What causes molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is caused by a virus that can be picked up through close personal contact with someone who has it, or from objects such as a shared flannel or a towel. The spots come up after an incubation period of a few weeks. They are more common and extensive in people who have atopic eczema (the type of eczema that runs in families together with asthma and hayfever). Sometimes people whose immune system is suppressed for any reason, such as taking immunosuppressive treatments may develop large numbers of molluscum contagiosum, but most people with molluscum contagiosum are perfectly healthy.

Is molluscum contagiosum hereditary?

No, though it often affects several members of a family at the same time.

What are its symptoms?

Usually there are no symptoms, but the spots can be itchy or sore if they become inflamed or infected. They can bleed slightly if scratched.

What does molluscum contagiosum look like?

The spots of molluscum contagiosum are easily recognised: a magnifying glass helps with this.

The spots are:

- Small (from 2 to 6 mm. across): rarely they can grow larger than this.
- Raised, and hemispherical (like a tiny dome), with a shiny surface.