

Molluscum Contagiosum

WHAT IS MOLLUSCUM?

Molluscum contagiosum is a common **viral infection** in children. When it causes small bumps on the skin around the eye or on the eyelids, it is called ocular molluscum.

A child may have just one bump or a group of bumps. The bumps are small, about 2-5 mm wide. They are pink or skin-colored. They often look smooth, round, and shiny, with a small dent in the center. [See figure 1].



Fig. 1: Picture of how molluscum typically looks.

HOW IS OCULAR MOLLUSCUM DIAGNOSED?

Doctors can usually tell it is molluscum just by looking at the bumps. No other tests may be needed. If a bump is removed, it can be sent to a lab to confirm the diagnosis.

Sometimes, when the bumps are close to the eye, they can cause eye redness or irritation called conjunctivitis (pink eye)..

WHAT OTHER DISEASES DOES OCULAR MOLLUSCUM RESEMBLE?

Molluscum bumps can look like other skin problems, such as:

- Warts (these feel rough and hard)
- Chickenpox (these have small fluid-filled blisters)
- Papillomas (these are pink growths, more common in adults)

A doctor can help tell the difference.

IS MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOUS?

Yes. Molluscum can spread from person to person.

It spreads by:

- Skin-to-skin contact
- Sharing towels, washcloths, bath toys, or bath water
- Scratching or rubbing the bumps (this can spread it to other parts of the body)

HOW CAN MOLLUSCUM BE PREVENTED?

To help prevent the spread:

- Do not share towels, washcloths, or bath items.
- Do not share bath water.
- Keep the bumps covered when possible.
- Try to avoid scratching or picking at the bumps.

WHO GETS OCULAR MOLLUSCUM?

Molluscum is most common in children. About 5 out of 100 children in the United States have had molluscum. Children with weak immune systems are more likely to get it.

IS MOLLUSCUM DANGEROUS?

No. Molluscum is not dangerous. The bumps may be itchy. If the bumps are near the eyelashes, the virus can cause red and irritated eyes.[See figure 2]



Fig. 2: Eye redness (called conjunctivitis) can happen when molluscum lesions are close to the eye

WHEN IS TREATMENT OF OCULAR MOLLUSUM NEEDED?

Treatment may be needed if:

- The bumps are spreading
- There is a risk of scarring

- Scratching may cause a skin infection
- The child has pink eye that does not go away

If pink eye is caused by molluscum, the bumps near the eyelid usually need to be removed for the redness to improve.

HOW IS MOLLUSCUM TREATED?

Most of the time, the bumps go away on their own in 6 to 9 months. Sometimes they can last for several years.

Before the bumps go away, the skin around them may turn a little red. This can be a sign that they are healing.

A doctor can remove the bumps by:

- Cutting them out
- Freezing them (cryotherapy)
- In people with weak immune systems, antiviral medicine may be used if other treatments do not work.

Even after treatment, the bumps can come back. Talk with your eye doctor or primary care doctor if you have questions.

Updated 03/2026