

Genital Molluscum contagiosum - Patient information leaflet

Key points

Molluscum contagiosum (MC) are benign skin growths caused by a virus
MC is passed from one person to another by direct skin to skin contact, including sex
Genital MC are usually sexually transmitted
In healthy people they will normally clear without treatment in 6 – 12 months
Condoms are not always protective

What are Molluscum contagiosum?

- ❖ Molluscum contagiosum is caused by a virus which leads to a benign skin infection.
- ❖ It is most common in children and causes small lumps on the face, neck, trunk and arms
- ❖ In adults, it most often sexually transmitted, and the lesions are on the genitals, pubic region, lower abdomen, upper thighs and/or buttocks

How do you get MC?

- ❖ In adults MC are usually spread by direct skin-to-skin contact during sex with someone who has this infection.
- ❖ Other ways of transmission might include or co-bathing and spread via the sharing of towels/sponges.
- ❖ MC usually appear 2 to 7 weeks after sex with someone MC, but they may take several months to appear.
- ❖ Even if you have had MC before, you can still catch the virus again and develop MC again

What are the symptoms of genital MC?

- ❖ The most common symptom is small lumps anywhere in the genital area, pubic area or inner thighs
- ❖ Lesions are dome-shaped, with smooth firm surface, pearly, skin-coloured, pink, yellow or white, 2–5 mm in diameter
- ❖ MC only rarely cause itching or discomfort
- ❖ Lesions vary in number from 1 to 30, but rarely hundreds and may be grouped or in lines

Do I need any tests?

- ❖ If symptoms that could be genital MC you should visit your family doctor or local sexual health or venereology/dermatology clinic for a check up.
- ❖ Genital MC is usually diagnosed on clinical grounds.
- ❖ Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between a MC and normal bumps and lumps in the genital area. A doctor or nurse will check more closely and may use a magnifying lens with a light (dermoscope) to have a closer look.
- ❖ If you have genital MC, you should also be tested for other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhoea as you may have more than one infection at the same time

What is the treatment for genital MC?

- ❖ If you are otherwise well and healthy, genital MC is harmless and usually resolves without treatment in 6–12 months.
- ❖ You can reduce the local spread of infection by avoiding scratching, shaving and waxing your genital area.
- ❖ If you have eczema, this should be treated with emollients to treat the itch and reduce the chance of spreading the MC by scratching.

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- ❖ Treatments are available for MC which can reduce the time to clearing the lesions but this should be balanced against the discomfort and side-effects of treatment, particularly on sensitive genital skin.

Clinic treatment (These need to be done by a doctor or nurse)

- ❖ Cryotherapy (freezing with liquid nitrogen).
- ❖ Electrosurgery / scissors excision / curettage / laser.

Home treatment (some of these cannot be used if there is a chance that you are pregnant)

- ❖ Podophyllotoxin cream or solution, potassium hydroxide, benzoyl peroxide etc.

Should I have sex if I have MC?

- ❖ It is sensible to have a check for other infections before having sex
- ❖ Using condoms may reduce the risk of passing the virus on, but not completely

What are the possible complications of MC?

- ❖ MC do not lead to any long-term physical problems
- ❖ MC do not affect fertility
- ❖ You can develop a secondary bacterial infection, especially if you have been scratching the lesions
- ❖ An eczema type reaction, called molluscum dermatitis, consisting of redness, scales and inflamed lesions may appear secondary to a local immune response
- ❖ Patients with atopic eczema tend to develop widespread molluscum lesions, which may not be limited to the visible eczema lesions
- ❖ Immunosuppressed patients can develop extensive, confluent, giant, multiple and/or widespread lesions

MC and pregnancy

- ❖ Very rarely, MC may be passed to your baby during childbirth
- ❖ If your baby is infected the resulting skin lesions will be harmless and will resolve on their own in time

Do I need to tell my partner?

- ❖ If you do have MC, it is recommended that your current sexual partner is told that sexual transmission to partners is possible as long as lesions are present and given general information about sexually transmitted infections and their prevention.

Further help and information

- ❖ If you suspect that you have genital MC or any other sexually transmitted infection, then see your family doctor or local sexual health or venereology/dermatology clinic.