

MSAD # 13 / RSU #83

Health Alert

Water Warts (Molluscum Contagiosum)

Important Notice to Parents

Molluscum Contagiosum, also called Water Warts, is a viral skin infection (pox family). It is a common infection in children often seen on the face, neck, armpit, arms, and hands. Typically, the lesion of molluscum begins as a small, painless papule that may become raised up to a pearly, flesh-colored nodule. The papule often has a dimple in the center. The skin lesion commonly has a central core or plug of white, cheesy or waxy material. The papules are about 2–5 millimeters wide. There is usually no inflammation and subsequently no redness unless there is trauma or a secondary infection. Scratching or other irritation may cause the virus to spread in a line or in groups, called crops. Typically there are a small number of lesions, usually between 2 and 20. Molluscum contagiosum is a self-limited infection; the papules usually disappear spontaneously within 6 to 12 months but may take as long as 4 years to resolve.

Molluscum lesions are mildly contagious and most often spread to other areas of the body instead of spreading to other children. However, the virus can also be spread from person to person. This can happen if the growths on one person are touched by another person. The virus can also spread to others through direct contact with contaminated objects, such as towels, clothing, or toys. Outbreaks have occasionally been reported in child care centers. Wrestlers or gymnasts may get it through contact with infected mats. Molluscum can also be spread from one person to another by sexual contact.

The incubation period for water warts has not been verified. However, it is estimated to be between 2 weeks and 6 months.

The period of communicability is unknown but once the lesions are gone, the individual is no longer contagious. In healthy individuals, these lesions ultimately disappear without scarring, unless there is excessive scratching, which may leave marks. Individual lesions usually disappear within about 2–3 months. Complete disappearance of all lesions generally occurs within about 6–18 months but may persist for up to a few years. The infection may persist and show rapid progression in immunosuppressed people.

Molluscum Contagiosum is usually self-limited in healthy individuals, (meaning it will go away on its own), treatment may be unnecessary. Nonetheless, issues such as lesion location, hereditary allergy possibilities, and the desire to prevent transmission may prompt therapy. There are a variety of treatment options currently available.

Because scratching or picking the lesions can spread it to other parts of the body, covering the lesions with a bandage may help stop scratching. Another reason growths should be kept clean and covered with clothing or a bandage is to minimize risk of direct contact which will help prevent or reduce spread of the infection. Participation in close-contact sports such as wrestling and basketball, or those that use shared equipment like gymnastics and baseball should be avoided unless all lesions can be covered by clothing or bandages. Personal items (such as towels, washcloths, goggles, swim suits and other clothes, hair brushes, wrist watches, bar soap, and any other personal items) should not be shared. Swimming should also be avoided unless all growths can be covered by watertight bandages. Items and equipment (such as kick boards and water toys) should be used only when all bumps are covered by watertight bandages. Individuals with water warts should avoid shaving or have electrolysis performed on body areas that have growths. People who have bumps in the genital area should avoid sexual contact until they have seen a health care provider.

Hand washing is always the best way to avoid molluscum infection, as well as many other infections. Hand washing removes germs that may have been picked up from other people or from surfaces that have germs on them.

Please contact the school nurse, Mel Chadbourne, RN if you have any questions. More information is also available at the Maine CDC web site.