MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

What is it?
Molluscum contagiosum is a skin disease caused by a virus from the molluscipox virus group. It is spread by skin to skin contact and occurs in all age groups.

What are the symptoms?
The symptoms may include:
• painless, smooth, firm, shiny, flesh-coloured, white, clear or yellow bumps/sores with a little dimple in the middle
• itchiness
• bumps on adults that usually appear on the lower abdomen, genitals or inner thighs
• bumps on children that usually appear on the face, trunk, arms or legs
• bumps which usually appear 7 days to 2 months after contact with infected person (may be as long as 6 months)

How is it diagnosed?
A diagnosis is made by looking at the skin for bumps. If necessary, a swab from the bumps or sores may be taken to confirm the diagnosis.

How is it spread?
Molluscum can be spread as long as the sores or bumps are present by:
• direct skin contact, both sexual and non-sexual
• scratching the bumps, which can spread the virus to other parts of the body
• sharing towels and clothing that has been in contact with the bumps

It has also been associated with swimming pools and sharing baths with an infected person.

How is it treated?
Without treatment bumps can last from 2 weeks to 4 years, with an average of 2 years. Treatment can help shorten the length of the infection and also help to prevent the spread of the virus to other parts of the body or to other people. Treatment can include:
• cantharone, podophyllin, liquid nitrogen or a peeling agent applied to the bump/sore
• surgical removal of bumps and sores

Are there complications?
Scratching bumps can allow bacteria into the skin and result in a more serious infection. Molluscum can reoccur but it is uncertain whether this is because of re-infection or reactivation of the infection.

People with a weak immune system may have a more severe outbreak with a larger number of bumps.

How is it prevented?
Molluscum can be prevented by:
• avoiding direct skin to skin contact with infected persons
• avoiding sexual contact when a partner has bumps or sores
• washing hands well after touching bumps/sores
• having sexual partners examined/treated to prevent re-infection
• using condoms to protect some of the area

REMEMBER: Condoms will not give total protection because the virus can be on other genital parts and surrounding skin.

For more information call Peel Health at 905-799-7700 and ask for Sexual Health Information or visit peelregion.ca intheknowpeel.ca peelsexualhealth.ca