Molluscum still contagious after treatment? [1]

Hey Alice,

A couple of months ago, I realized that I had molluscum contagiosum. I went to a doctor and had that confirmed and I started the treatment and now the bumps are gone and there is nothing left. So I was wondering whether I could still be contagious or not because I am about to start seeing somebody and I need to make sure that I don't have anything. :)

Answer

Dear Reader,

Mollusca are typically small, skin colored bumps or lesions caused by a virus that appear singly or in groups and can be found anywhere on the body. If left untreated, they usually disappear on their own in healthy individuals and it can take anywhere between six to twelve months for them to disappear completely. That said, for those with weakened immune systems, they may take longer to clear up and in general, bumps may reappear for up to five years. As in your case, some health care providers (and patients) opt for the bumps to be removed via medical intervention (more on that in a bit). The good news is that since the infection is most likely to be transmitted when bumps are present, it seems less likely that you’re contagious if they haven’t come back after treatment.

For those who are unfamiliar with treatment methods, they can include:

- Prescription and non-prescription topical ointments (some of which may be toxic to a fetus, so pregnant folks will want to get medical advice before using these methods)
- Oral medication, though this is therapy typically used for children with the infection
- Physical removal by surgical procedures, including cryotherapy (using liquid nitrogen to freeze the bumps), curettage (piercing and removing material from bumps), and laser therapy

List adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [2].

Again, once the bumps are gone, this is typically a sign that the virus has cleared the body and that you’re no longer contagious. However, it’s worth mentioning that it’s still possible to get
molluscum contagiosum again — having had it before doesn’t prevent you from being infected another time. If new bumps appear at some point in the future, it’s likely due to contact with another infected person or contaminated items.

Asking whether or not you could still be contagious shows that you not only care about yourself, but about others as well. It may be a good idea to keep an eye out for additional bumps that might appear following your treatment. Covering up any new bumps with watertight bandages will help minimize the risk of transmitting to another person or another part of your body. Just make sure to remove the bandages at night (as long as there is no risk of contact with another person) to keep your skin healthy. Additionally, practicing safer sex [3] is wise to protect yourself and your partner(s) — and the first step to doing that is open and honest communication. Sharing your experiences and making time to discuss the situation will likely serve to make the relationship stronger. You may also want to have some information (this Q&A perhaps) with you during the talk.

Congratulations on meeting some new and interesting,

Alice!

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