



EUROPEAN
ACADEMY OF
DERMATOLOGY &
VENEREOLOGY

Information Leaflet
for Patients

Mollusca contagiosa



The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet is designed to help you understand more about mollusca contagiosa during pregnancy. It tells you what they are, what causes them, and what can be done about them.

Mollusca contagiosa

What are mollusca contagiosa?

Mollusca contagiosa is an infectious disease caused by a virus. They are small (1-5 mm), firm, skin-coloured papules often with a central indentation, grouped or scattered anywhere on the body. Usually there are many of them, but occasionally there is only one (they may be larger in that case). Usually they do not cause pain or itch.

What causes them?

Mollusca contagiosa are caused by a viral infection. They spread from one person to another and spread from one site of the body to the surrounding skin.

Who is at risk of acquiring the disease?

The disease occurs worldwide and is common in children. It is usually not caught by occasional contacts, but instead close child-to-child or person-to-person contact. In people with *atopic dermatitis/eczema*, *mollusca contagiosa* often occur at the sites of the eczema. People with a compromised immune system (such as HIV infection or transplant patients) have a higher risk of acquiring *mollusca contagiosa* and may have widespread disease.

Pregnant women may have a higher risk of acquiring *mollusca contagiosa*, since during pregnancy the immune system is altered. There are no risks for the unborn child; however, the disease may spread to the baby once it is born.

How is the diagnosis of mollusca contagiosa made?

Because of their typical appearance, the lesions are normally easy to diagnose when the clinician looks at them. In case of doubt, an examination under a microscope can be performed; in this case, one *papule* is

scraped off and sent to the laboratory for further examination.

Are there any complications?

Mollusca contagiosa may get inflamed (irritation or bacterial infection), then they may be painful; in immunocompromised patients you may find many *mollusca contagiosa* (generalized disease).

How should mollusca contagiosa be treated?

There are several possibilities of how *mollusca contagiosa* can be treated:

- 1) Doing nothing is one option, because in most patients they will eventually go away by themselves. However, as long as you have them, they may spread to other people.
- 2) Some simple measures that your clinician can perform to cause the spots to become inflamed and then go away. These include squeezing the spots out with a pair of forceps, and piercing them with a small sharp stick.
- 3) Mild cryotherapy (2-3 seconds of freezing with liquid nitrogen)
- 4) Scraping off the lesions (curettage) after numbing the skin with an anaesthetic cream
- 5) Other therapies are not proven to be safe in pregnancy and are not routinely used.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this leaflet is accurate, not every treatment will be suitable or effective for every person. Your own clinician will be able to advise in greater detail.