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Photo Vignette

Molluscum gladiatorum

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Abstract

Molluscum contagiosum is a self-limited disease that presents as small papules with central umbilication. Similar to herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) and tinea corporis, participation in wrestling is a risk factor for molluscum infection in children and adults. Referred to as herpes gladiatorum, HSV-1 causes cutaneous or ocular infections in wrestlers. We propose that molluscum contagiosum be referred to as “molluscum gladiatorum” when infection occurs in the context of wrestling. We report a case of a high school wrestler who presented with molluscum lesions on his neck.

Keywords: molluscum gladiatorum; tinea gladiatorum; tinea corporis gladiatorum; herpes gladiatorum; molluscum contagiosum; poxviridae; sports; wrestling

Case Report



Figure 1. Skin-colored papules with central umbilication on the anterior and lateral neck of a high school wrestler.

A 19-year-old man presented with numerous skin lesions on his neck for several months. He had skin-colored, dome-shaped papules on his anterior and lateral neck (Figure 1). He was asymptomatic and had no prior treatment for these lesions. He was not sexually active, but had a history of wrestling for the previous 5 years. A curette biopsy showed endophytic squamous proliferation with characteristic eosinophilic cytoplasmic inclusions (molluscum bodies) (Figure 2).

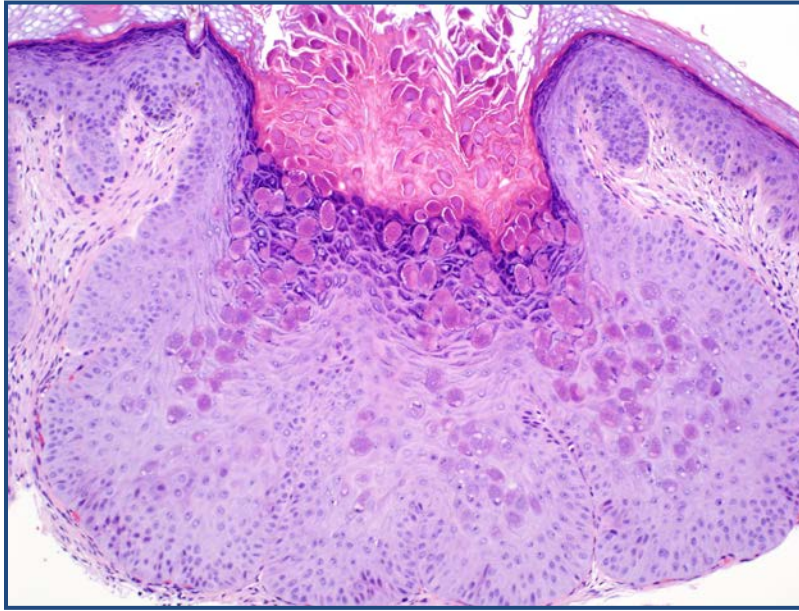


Figure 2. Endophytic squamous proliferation with characteristic eosinophilic cytoplasmic inclusions (molluscum bodies). (H&E 100x)

Discussion

When HSV-1 causes cutaneous or ocular infection in wrestlers, the disease is referred to as herpes gladiatorum [1]. It is the most common skin disorder in wrestlers [2]. It presents with vesicles on an erythematous plaque, with rupture of the vesicles causing erosions. In an outbreak of 175 high school wrestlers attending a 4-week training camp, HSV-1 infection was diagnosed in 34% of the wrestlers [1]. The majority of these lesions were on the head. In this outbreak, absence of HSV-1 in the oropharyngeal swabs suggested that saliva is not the major source of transmission. Rather, transmission is mainly through skin-to-skin contact, with transmission through fomites playing a less important role [1].

Tinea corporis infections in wrestlers are also common and referred to as either tinea gladiatorum or tinea corporis gladiatorum [2]. An outbreak of tinea corporis was reported in a high school wrestling team, with 21 of 28 wrestlers found to have lesions consistent with tinea corporis [3]. Ten of these subjects had *Trichophyton tonsurans* infections that were confirmed by culture [3]. The majority of cases of tinea gladiatorum are caused by *T. tonsurans*. However, only 40% of tinea corporis infections are related to *T. tonsurans* when not related to wrestling [2].

Molluscum contagiosum is a disease of the skin and mucous membranes caused by a virus of the *Poxviridae* family. It presents as small, pearly white or skin-colored dome shaped papules with central umbilication. Similar to HSV-1 and tinea corporis, a risk factor for molluscum contagiosum is participation in wrestling. Transmission of molluscum contagiosum occurs through direct contact with infected wrestlers and wrestling mats. From 1991 to 1993, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Injury Surveillance System (ISS) data revealed that 0.3% of all skin infections in collegiate wrestlers were molluscum infections [4]. We propose that the term “molluscum gladiatorum” be used to describe infection with molluscum contagiosum in the context of wrestling.

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