

MARINE ANIMAL BITES

Jellyfish or Portuguese Man-of-War Reactions

The jellyfish and Portuguese man-of-war have long, stinging tentacles. They produce lines of redness and burning pain. Sometimes they cause generalized symptoms, such as weakness, chills, fever, or vomiting.

First Aid:

- Scrape off any stinging tentacles with the edge of a credit card or knife. Don't scrub the area because that can trigger the stingers.
- Neutralize the venom with a continuous application of vinegar for 30 minutes.
- Apply 1% hydrocortisone cream (no prescription needed) four times a day for a few days to reduce itching.

Call your child's health care provider immediately if:

- Any generalized symptoms, such as weakness, chills, fever, or vomiting, have developed.

Venomous Fish Reactions

Venomous fish--such as the stingray, stonefish, and scorpion fish--always cause pain and redness in the area that was stung. They also often cause weakness, sweating, fever, vomiting, muscle cramps, or even shock. The stingray has one or more venomous spines on its tail. The stinging fish usually have venom in dorsal spines.

First Aid:

Fortunately, the venom of all these fish can be destroyed by heat.

- Remove any particles of stingray spine left in the wound and rinse the area with sea water.
- Soak the affected area in pleasantly hot water 110° to 114°F (43° to 45°C) for 30 minutes. Do not get the water so hot that it will burn your child. Hot water breaks down any venom from a poisonous fish or sea urchin and helps reduce the pain.

Call your child's health care provider immediately if:

- Any generalized symptoms have developed.
- The skin is split open after a stingray sting and may need stitches.
- The barb or spine needs to be removed.

Cuts or Lacerations From Fish

Some fish--for example, moray eels, sharks, barracudas--cause a bite mark without injecting any venom.

First Aid:

Wash the area with sea water. Later, wash with soap and water.

Call your child's health care provider immediately if:

- Bleeding won't stop after 10 minutes of direct pressure.
- The skin is split open and may need stitches.
- A puncture wound is present.

Stings (Such as Sea Urchins, Sea Anemones, Coral)

Sea anemones (sea nettle) or coral can cause swelling and pain in the area that was touched for 24 to 48 hours. A sea urchin can cause pain if part of a venomous spine breaks off in the skin. If not removed, it may dissolve or cause a persistent tender lump (a foreign-body reaction).

First Aid:

Also, neutralize the venom with a hot water soak (see venomous fish first aid for details). If a large fragment of a sea urchin barb is in the skin, try to remove it with a sterile needle and tweezers as you would do for a sliver.

Shocks (Such as Electric Eels)

Your child may feel shocked, stunned, or partially paralyzed after contact with an electric eel.

First Aid:

Your child needs no treatment other than lying down with the feet elevated until he or she feels better. Your child will feel and act normal in 20 to 30 minutes.