

Treating Marine Life Injuries

The planet's oceans are an endless playground and millions of people worldwide are drawn to the seashore to wade, swim, surf, snorkel, scuba dive, windsurf, kite board and kayak. As on land, the marine environment has its share of potential hazards from critters that may bite, puncture or sting. There is always the possibility of accidents that may result in cuts, envenomations and abrasions. Terrestrial pests like mosquitoes, bees, spiders and snakes can be aggressive while the majority of marine animals are defensive by nature. You won't be swarmed by aggressive jellyfish or chased and bitten by a moray eel as you swim by. Marine injuries are rare and preparation and knowledge can avoid most. However, if it's your unlucky day and you happen to be stung, bitten or cut, here's what to do.

Stings are the most prevalent of marine injuries and can come from a variety of sources. There are over 200 species of jellyfish; some sting and some don't. The feathery hydroids that adhere to the rocks are mildly irritating but their floating cousin, the man of war, can be excruciatingly painful and the large ones can be dangerous. Several species of coral can also give a painful and toxic sting and the first aid will be similar for all. Immediately flush the area with saltwater; use tweezers to remove any adhering tentacles and soak the affected area in the hottest water possible. For wounds involving protein-based toxins, a paste made from meat tenderizer will help break down the venom. To guard against an allergic reaction, an antihistamine should be administered

Puncture wounds are the second most prevalent marine injury and they can be quite painful, debilitating and in some instances fatal. The pesky sea urchin can be found in cracks in the rocks, on reefs and adhering to dock pilings. Try to remove any embedded spines with tweezers. Urchin spines are very brittle and great care must be used in their extraction. Flush the area of the wound with fresh water and soak in the hottest water bearable. Scrub with antibacterial soap and leave the wound open guarding against infection. All the species of stonefish are venomous, their toxin being injected from the dorsal spines. The pain from stonefish injuries can be excruciating and immersion in warm water may somewhat alleviate it. Antivenom is available and the victim should be guarded against infection and tetanus

Bites are the least prevalent of marine injuries and usually come about by human indiscretions. You wouldn't dangle a T bone steak to lure a lion from its lair or carry around a black mamba, so don't

try to entice that moray eel with a hot dog that suspiciously resembles your thumb or carry that cute little octopus in the palm of your hand. Octopi have a beak like mouth that can deliver a nasty bite and moray's teeth are designed to keep hold. Even that porcupine puffer that you have all blown up can spin around and nip off the end of a finger. Any bite wounds should be cleaned with a disinfectant and antibiotic ointment should be applied. Consult a physician for deeper cuts.

There are some genuine bad boys in some areas of the world that will truly ruin your day. The Box jellyfish or Sea Wasp, inhabits the Indo Pacific regions and has one of the most toxic venoms on earth. It attacks the heart and nervous system and accounts for numerous deaths annually. Vinegar should be applied immediately to disable the nematocyst's ability to sting and as cardiac arrest can come on quickly, be prepared to administer CPR. The victim should be transported, immediately, to the nearest medical facility.

The Blue ring octopus is a beautiful creature and is an inhabitant of Pacific waters from Japan to Australia. The Blue Ring is recognized as one of the most venomous marine animals on earth with no known antivenin available. The Blue Ring's venom paralyzes the victim's respiratory muscles and although they may be completely conscious, they will be unable to breathe. Emergency rescue breathing must be administered and continued until the poison has been eliminated from the body.

The beautiful cone shells of the Pacific Ocean are prized by collectors worldwide for their intricate patterns and vibrant colors. The most valuable seashell on earth is the *Conus Gloriamaris* or the Glory of the Sea cone shell. All cone shells have a harpoon like proboscis that is shot out of the narrow end of the shell and into their prey. Some cone shells have an extremely toxic poison that has been known to cause death in humans. If punctured, apply pressure to the wound and prepare to give CPR as the venom causes paralysis and cardiac arrest. Transport immediately to the nearest medical facility.

No discourse on marine life injuries would be complete without a discussion about sharks. The shark has been human beings worst, marine, nightmare since the beginning of time. In reality, shark attacks are quite rare but when they do occur, the end result is often tragic. Of the 300 species of sharks, there are only a few that pose a threat to man. When shark attacks occur, the sharks are reacting to a stimulus that man may or may not be aware of. From below, the silhouette of a surfboard with appendages looks to a White shark like their favorite fare, a sealion, and the

spearfisherman with a bloody, struggling, fish is essentially calling in sharks. Wounds produced by a shark bite are traumatic with deep lacerations and rapid blood loss. Bleeding must be stopped, the victim treated for shock and transported to medical facilities.