

Jellyfish Sting

Definition

- Sting from a jellyfish
- Jellyfish cause most of the stings that occur in sea water
- The main symptoms are pain, burning and redness at the sting site. Red lines are common.

Health Information

Jellyfish Facts

- They are umbrella shaped, clear sea creatures with long trailing tentacles. They move slowly through the water by pulsing the upper body. Also carried by ocean currents. Their tentacles can be 10 feet or longer.
- **Other Names.** Jellies or sea jellies. Large groups of jellies are called a bloom. Blooms can close beaches. The Sea Nettle is a type of stinging jellyfish often found in Chesapeake Bay.
- **Where They Live.** Found in every ocean and coastline.
- **Numbers.** Jellies have increased in numbers worldwide. Warmer ocean temps and pollution of ocean waters are factors. Fishing the ocean too much is also a cause. Tuna, shark and swordfish eat jellies.
- **Stings.** Stings can occur while wading or swimming in salt water. Honolulu gets over 1000 911 calls per month for stings.
- **Beached Jellies.** Even beached or dying jellies can sting. So can pieces of tentacles floating in the water. They can release venom for up to 2 weeks.
- **Treatment.** Vinegar is used to stop the venom in stingers.
- **Prevention.** Mainly do not go in the water where jellies are seen. Wearing a thin layer of clothing also can protect you. Reason: The stingers are short and cannot puncture clothing. Special "stinger suits" can be bought in diving stores.

Cause of Sting Reactions

- The long tentacles have thousands of stingers.
- When a stinger is touched, it pierces the skin and injects venom.
- The venom is what causes all the symptoms.

Types of Jellyfish Sting Reactions

- **Local Reactions** are most common. Symptoms are raised, red lines that cross each other. The sting causes pain or burning at the site. Sometimes hives occur in the sting area. Blisters can occur in severe cases. Severe pain lasts 1-2 hours. Itch may last for a week. If the skin damage is severe, red or purple lines can last for weeks.
- **General Reactions** can occur if there are many stings. More stings give a higher dose of venom. Large venom symptoms are vomiting, dizziness, weakness and headache.
- **Anaphylaxis** (A severe allergic reaction). Life-threatening reactions are very rare with jelly fish stings. Most are caused by box jellyfish found in the South Pacific and Australia. The main symptoms are trouble breathing and swallowing, along with hives. It starts rapidly, most often within 20 minutes of the sting.

1. **Overview on Jellyfish Stings:**
 - Jellyfish cause most of the stings that occur in the ocean.
 - Most stings are harmless. The pain is like a bee sting.
 - Jellies have long tentacles with lots of tiny stingers.
 - Pieces of tentacles that wash up on the beach can still cause stings.
 - They produce lines of redness and burning pain.
 - Here is some care advice that should help.
2. **Step 1 - Remove Any Large Tentacles with Sea Water:**
 - Rinse area with sea water. This will help remove any large tentacles stuck to the skin.
 - Do not rinse with fresh water (will trigger stingers).
 - Do not scrub or rub area (will trigger stingers).
 - Do this until you can get some vinegar.
3. **Step 2 - Rinse with Vinegar to Stop the Stinging: (Exception: Chesapeake Bay jellyfish - see #6)**
 - Rinse area with vinegar (5% acetic acid) for 15 minutes.
 - Reason: Stops the small stingers from stinging if still attached to the skin.
 - Caution: Do not use with Chesapeake Bay jellyfish. (Reason: May trigger stingers. Instead, use a baking soda rinse with these stings).
 - Caution: also do not use rubbing alcohol, ammonia, urine, fresh water or ice. They all can trigger the release of more venom.
 - If you don't have vinegar, move on to scraping off the stingers.
4. **Step 3 - Scrape the Area to Remove Small Stingers:**
 - Scrape off any stingers you can see. Use the edge of a credit card or a dinner knife.
 - Do not use your bare fingers. (Reason: you will get stings on your hands). Put on gloves if you have them.
 - Then, coat area with shaving cream or any mild cream. Scrape the area again.
 - If the stingers are stuck to body hair, shave with a razor.
5. **Step 4 - Repeat Vinegar Rinse: (Exception: Chesapeake Bay Jellyfish - go to #6)**
 - Keep a cloth wet with vinegar on the area.
 - Do this for 15 more minutes.
6. **Chesapeake Bay Jellyfish (Sea Nettle) - Rinse with Baking Soda To Stop The Stinging:**
 - Rinse area with a mixture of sea water and baking soda for 15 minutes.
 - This stops the small stingers from stinging if still attached to the skin.
 - Then, remove small stingers with scraping or shaving.
 - Caution: Do not use vinegar to rinse.
7. **Pain Medicine:**
 - To help with the pain, give an acetaminophen product (such as Tylenol).
 - Another choice is an ibuprofen product (such as Advil).
 - Use as needed.
8. **Cold Pack for Pain:**
 - For pain and swelling, rub with an ice cube. You can also use a cold wet washcloth. Do this for 10 minutes as needed.
 - Caution: Don't use until stingers are removed. (Reason: water or ice will trigger stingers).

9. **Steroid Cream for Itching:**

- For itching or swelling, put 1% hydrocortisone cream (such as Cortaid) on the sting.
- No prescription is needed.
- Use 3 times per day.
- Keep the cream in the fridge. (Reason: it feels better if put on cold).

10. **What to Expect:**

- Minor stings: Severe burning pain will lessen within 1-2 hours. Red blotches and lines often improve in 24 hours. Red lines may last 1-2 weeks.
- More severe stings: Blisters appear within 6 hours. You should be seen by a doctor if blisters appear.

Call Your Doctor If

- Blisters appear
- Severe pain lasts over 2 hours
- Redness or rash lasts over 2 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

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