

# Marine Bites and Stings



In North America, most marine animal bites and stings aren't deadly. But some may cause a deep wound or severe allergic reaction. You're most likely to come in contact with biting or stinging marine life—including jellyfish, sculpins, and stingrays—when you're swimming or wading in ocean water. These animals don't attack you. But they may sting if they're stepped on or touched. Even dead jellyfish can sometimes release venom (poison) when handled.

## When to go to the emergency room

Not all marine animal stings need urgent care. But you should get emergency care if any of the following is true:

- You don't know what type of sting you have.
- You have a history of allergic reactions.
- You are stung on the face or neck.
- You have trouble breathing.
- You have severe pain with or without swelling of the area.

## What to expect in the ER

- Your injury will be cleaned and examined.
- A jellyfish sting may be rinsed with salt (saline) solution or vinegar. This prevents more toxins from being released. Any tentacles left in your skin will be removed.
- If your reaction is severe, you may be given a steroid medicine to help control it.
- If you are in pain, medicine may be prescribed to make you more comfortable. Heat will also help ease most stings.

## Follow-up care

See your healthcare provider if:

- The wound isn't healing
- You have signs of infection such as:
  - Redness
  - Pain
  - Discharge
  - Fever of 100.4° F ( 38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider

Get emergency care if you have signs of an allergic reaction. These can occur up to a month after a jellyfish sting:

- Itching

- Swelling of the affected body part, hands, head, face, or tongue
- Trouble breathing

### **After a bite or sting**

- Stay calm.
- Get out of the water safely.
- Remove any stingers you see with tweezers or the tips of your fingers. If you use your fingers, rinse them in seawater directly afterwards. It's best to inactivate stingers with vinegar before removing them. This helps prevent the release of extra venom.
- Wash the area with saltwater. Vinegar may help ease the pain of jellyfish stings.
- Don't raise the stung body part above the level of your heart.
- Don't take any medicine unless told to by a healthcare provider.
- Don't apply ice to jellyfish stings. Instead use heat. Heat makes the jellyfish poison inactive.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions  
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.