

FACT SHEET 3

MARINE STINGERS



Marine Stingers:

Australia's waters contain many sea creatures, including marine stingers. Although they are generally quite easy to avoid, stingers can cause discomfort if you are stung and some tropical species (the Irukandji and the Box Jellyfish, for example) can be lethal.

So, to ensure you enjoy your day at the beach, always remember to swim at a patrolled beach and look out for the safety signs.

Treatment:

If you are stung, or are with someone else who has been stung, the treatment will vary depending on where you are, and what type of stinger is involved.

In tropical waters:

(generally north of Bundaberg in Queensland and Geraldton in Western Australia)

Jellyfish capable of causing life-threatening stings primarily occur along the tropical coastline of Australia from Bundaberg in Queensland northwards, across the northern coastline and down to Geraldton in Western Australia. In areas where dangerous tropical jellyfish are prevalent, (e.g. Box Jellyfish or Irukandji), if the species causing the sting cannot be clearly identified, it is safer, to treat the victim with vinegar. It is recommended that a full-body lycra suit, or equivalent, be worn to provide a good measure of protection against marine stings, particularly during the stinger season, which generally runs from November to March.

For tropical jellyfish stings:

- **Remove** the patient from the water and restrain if necessary
- Call for help (**dial 000** or get a surf lifesaver or lifeguard to help you)
- Assess the patient and commence **CPR** as necessary
- Liberally **douse** the stung area with **vinegar** to neutralise invisible stinging cells
 - **do not wash with fresh water**
- If vinegar is unavailable, **pick off** any remnants of the tentacles (this is not harmful to the rescuer) and rinse sting well with **seawater (not freshwater)**
- **Seek medical assistance** with rapid transport to hospital



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For more information on any matters relating to aquatic safety contact:

Surf Life Saving Australia
(02) 9300 4000 or
slsa.com.au

Surf Life Saving NSW
(02) 9984 7188 or
surflifesaving.com.au

Surf Life Saving QLD
(07) 3846 8000 or
lifesaving.com.au

Life Saving Victoria
(03) 9676 6900 or
lifesavingvictoria.com.au

Surf Life Saving SA
(08) 8354 6900 or
surfrescue.com.au

Surf Life Saving WA
(08) 9243 9444 or
mybeach.com.au

Surf Life Saving TAS
(03) 6223 5555 or
slst.asn.au

Surf Life Saving NT
(08) 8985 6588 or
lifesavingnt.com.au

Or contact your local surf life saving club.



In non-tropical waters:

(generally south of both Bundaberg in Queensland and Geraldton in Western Australia)

- Keep the **victim at rest** and under constant observation
- **Do not allow rubbing** of the sting area
- **Pick off** any remaining tentacles **with fingers** (a harmless prickling may be felt)
- **Rinse** the stung area well with **seawater** to remove any invisible stinging cells

The next steps are dependent on what type of stinger is involved.



For non-tropical Bluebottle stings:

- Place the victim's stung area in hot water (no hotter than the rescuer can comfortably tolerate)
- If the pain is unrelieved by the heat, or if hot water is not available, apply cold packs or wrapped ice



- If local pain is unrelieved by these treatments, or generalised pain develops, or the sting area is large (half of a limb or more), or if the patient appears to be suffering an allergic reaction to the sting, **seek urgent medical help** (dial 000 or get a surf lifesaver or lifeguard)



For other non-tropical minor jellyfish stings:

- Do not wash the sting with fresh water
- Apply cold packs or wrapped ice for pain



References:

Australian Resuscitation Council – Envenomation – Jellyfish stings – see www.resus.org.au
Surf Life Saving Australia, Marine Stinger Protective Swimwear Policy – see www.slsa.com.au

