



A Divers Guide To Things That Sting

"Look but don't touch" is a saying most of us remember from our early years. It's one of those quotes they teach in Motherhood 101, along with things like "Clean your plate" and "If you make that ugly face again your face is gonna freeze like that."

But alas, Mom was right, at least in most cases. The wisdom she imparted to us during our formative years has proven to be good manners, or just plain common sense.

For SCUBA divers and snorklers, "Look, but don't touch" is indeed good advice, for two reasons. First of all, handling delicate marine animals such as coral and anemones can injure or kill the animals. Secondly, certain animals are capable of producing painful stings that could produce serious medical situations.

Many marine animals rely upon stinging cells called nematocysts to immobilize their prey. In most cases, simply touching a coral or similar creature will not cause a person serious harm. EXCEPT with certain types of animal, OR if an individual has a particular sensitivity to the nematocysts. In either of those cases, a reaction could occur, ranging from mild discomfort to an acute medical emergency.

So, what do you do about it?

- A. Learn more about marine animals
- B. Be prepared in case of injury from a marine animal
- C. Look, but don't touch
- D. Don't go near the water
- E. Kill all the coral and fill the oceans with cement

The correct answer : NOT "All of the above", but a combination of A, B and C.

The following information is provided for you to learn more about some local types of marine creatures known to be potentially harmful to humans. This should not be considered a complete listing.

COELENTERATES

Members of the Phylum Coelenterata have two basic physical types, the polyp and the medusa. The polyp is attached to a surface, the medusa is free floating. They all generally possess nematocysts. Members of this Phylum include corals,

jellyfish, hydroids, sea anemones, sea feathers and sea fans.

HYDROIDS

Corals - There are several species of fire coral in our area. They are quite common, and appear in some form on almost every reef. The colonies may be encrusting, or may form upright, thick branches, or small spikes. Encrusting fire coral sometimes grows over the skeleton of sea fans. The colony is generally mustard brown to light yellow, with whitish tips. The surface is smooth, but when examined closely, may appear to be covered with tiny hairs. These "hairs" are the nematocysts. Contact with a live colony may produce a welt and cause a mild to severe burning sensation which can last for a few hours. In some cases, a rash may appear.

Stinging Hydroid - A number of species of hydroids are found in these waters. They are often mistaken for plants, resembling small ferns. Some can be described as feather-like. They are usually brown to green in color. Hydroids are commonly found in shallow water growing on rocks, docks, ropes, pilings and marine grasses.

ANEMONES

Branching Anemone - Also called the Antler Anemone, it is often found in holes or crevices in the reef. It appears as a carpet-like mat during the day, with its tentacles unbranched and extended at night for feeding.

It is medium to light brown in color, with white "pseudotentacles" visible during the day. In some forms, small white inflated spheres packed with stinging capsules adorn the forked pseudotentacles. Its sting can be severe, producing blistered skin.

Sun Anemone - These anemones are covered with short tentacles and are usually found in clusters in very shallow water. The color varies from light tan to green. Small anemone crabs can be found hiding in their tentacles. Its sting can cause mild to severe pain.

Article to be continued next issue. Article written by Cathy C. Lawlor - Former DFW employee.

Quote

"For most of the wild things on earth the future must depend upon the conscience of mankind."

- Dr. Archie Carr

Can One Hotel Make A Difference?

Yes, the Resort management and staff at the El Cid Mega Resort in Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico have made a commitment to improve the environment. We know that some of these practices are employed at local resorts in the Virgin Islands but wouldn't it be great if all of them did?

Here are a few of the practices at the El Cid Mega Resort.

- an active solar system to warm the water for the pools in the winter, and for the rest of the Resort all year-round.

- To conserve water, they built their own water treatment and recycling plant to irrigate landscaping, lawns and golf courses.

- The Resort recommends and endorses only the "catch and release" fishing fleets. These are boats that cater to fishermen who pride themselves on their sportsmanship, not the destruction of life.

- Employees are encouraged to participate in an environmental education program offered by the Resort. They also benefit from a trash recycling program which allows them to earn some extra pocket money.

- The message of recycling is taken a step further by convincing suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging that is used in the hotel. Since 1994, the hotel has not purchased any product packed in plastic or nondegradable containers.

- Guest are encouraged to help in the world conservation effort with these simple steps:

- Don't entertain "ghosts." Turn off televisions, radios, air conditioners, and lights when you leave your room.

- Take shorter showers and turn water off while soaping.

- Turn water off while soaping your hands and brushing your teeth.

- Close your curtains to keep out the heat.

There is no need to stop these practices once you've returned home. Here are a few more examples of practices you can implement at home:

- Use ceramic or glass drinking cups instead of paper, plastic or any other non-degradable materials.

- Buy economy size products.

- Use rechargeable batteries.

- Use cloth table covers, cloth napkins, and cloth shopping bags instead of paper or nondegradable ones.

- Leave grass clippings and leaves on the lawn to fertilize it and to save landfill space.

- Install lower wattage and energy saver light bulbs.

- Conserve water by installing flow restrictors on showerheads and other faucets.

- Run dishwashers and washing machines only with full loads to conserve time and energy.

- Always turn off lights when you leave a room.

- To save energy, turn appliances off when not in use. Unplug water heater when not in use.

- To prevent pollution, turn off your car engine if stopping for longer than 30 seconds.

This is the only home we have, please make an effort to do your part and save the Earth. Every little bit adds up!



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