



Australian Prescriber

MEDIA RELEASE

2 October 2007

Hot water or vinegar treatment for venomous sea creatures

With summer approaching, more people will be visiting Australian beaches. Coastal waters are the home of several venomous sea creatures that cause stings and other injuries. Marine injuries or stings are common, but the majority cause only minor effects and do not require medical intervention. How to manage injuries caused by marine creatures is discussed in an article by poisons expert Dr Geoffrey Isbister in the October issue of ***Australian Prescriber***.

The most frequent marine stings are from jellyfish, mainly bluebottles. The best treatment is to wash them off with seawater, carefully remove the tentacles, and then immerse the injured site in hot water. "An open-labelled randomised controlled trial found that immersion in hot water at 45°C for 20 minutes causes a clinically important reduction in pain in 87% of patients compared to only 33% treated with ice packs," explained Dr Isbister.

Bluebottle stings cause an immediate and intense local pain which lasts for about an hour or longer in more severe cases. A rash or localised redness at the sting site may remain for hours or days.

Box jellyfish are the most dangerous and may cause severe and potentially life-threatening effects. Deaths from box jellyfish in the past 15 years have followed rapid envenoming, with cardiovascular collapse occurring within 20-30 minutes at remote beaches in northern Australia. "First aid consists of immediate removal of any tentacles and generous application of vinegar," he said. "Vinegar deactivates the remaining nematocysts (stinging cells) and prevents further envenoming."

Local pain can initially be treated with ice packs, but may require oral or parenteral analgesia.

Other articles in the October issue of ***Australian Prescriber*** include **Antidepressants in pregnancy and breastfeeding** by Anne Sved Williams; **Consumer Medicine Information conundrums** by Parisa Aslani; **Prescribing exercise for diabetes** by Bronwyn Penny. For the full text of the articles, visit www.australianprescriber.com

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Australian Prescriber is an independent peer-reviewed journal providing critical commentary on therapeutic topics for health professionals, particularly doctors in general practice. It is published by the National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS), an independent, non-profit organisation for Quality Use of Medicines funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. *Australian Prescriber* is distributed every two months in hard copy to health professionals, free of charge, and online in full text at www.australianprescriber.com.