

Stay Stinger (box jellyfish) Safe

Splash

STINGER SAFETY

Stinger Season October - May

It is not safe to be in seawater and tidal creeks on the Northern Territory coast during the months October through to May.

Northern Territory Beaches

The Northern Territory has 5,022 km of coastline and 1,488 beaches - over 200 of these beaches are 'surf beaches' and are mainly found on the east coast of Arnhem Land and becoming increasingly popular with school and community groups and tourism operators.

Many Top End beaches are characterised by strong tidal currents with shallow low tide terrace structures and inshore rocks and reefs. Shallow inshore areas often have high levels of suspended silt which hides the bottom - so be careful when entering the water, no diving.

Understanding the ocean is very important - the more you know about how waves, wind and tides affect conditions in the water, the safer you will be and the better equipped you will be to keep others safe from danger. Recognising danger signs, and awareness of open water conditions, is essential in Australia.

The most popular beaches in the Northern Territory are in Darwin - Mindil Beach, Neillcott Beach and Casuarina Beach. In Arnhem Land at Nhulunbuy's Town Beach or nearby Little Bardi Beach and Yirralba's Sandy Beach when swimmers are on duty - usually weekends during the dry season.

When is Swimming safer?

Beach swimming in the Northern Territory should be undertaken in the dry season months of June, July, August and September - these months are outside the 'Stinger Season'. Consider protective clothing (long sleeved tops with shorts or a sunsuit) as stings have occurred in all months of the year. Small children are at greatest risk, so always cover them up and keep a close watch. Surf Life Saving NT recommends that you swim between the flags where there are lifeguards and lifesaving resources. Only Darwin's Mindil Beach has lifeguards on duty every afternoon, June-October.

What to do if you get a tropical marine sting?

If you are stung, or are with someone else who has been stung, the treatment will vary depending on your location and what type of stinger is involved. In areas where dangerous tropical jellyfish are found and the species causing the sting cannot be clearly identified, it is safer to treat the victim with vinegar.

The treatment is as follows:

- 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 sting 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 (gently with gloves) and rinse sting well with seawater (not freshwater).
- Seek medical assistance and transport to the hospital immediately.

For more information, go to www.marinestingers.com.au/australia



FLAGS

- Put the Red and Yellow Flags and swim between them.
- Look at, understand and obey the yellow flags.
- Ask a Lifeguard or Lifesaver for advice before you enter the water.
- Get a flag if in doubt.
- Stick your head up, stay calm and ask for help if you get in trouble.



Protect yourself against tropical marine stingers

Rules for safe swimming apply to help reduce the risk of incidents involving marine stingers:



- It is recommended that a full body lycra suit, or equivalent, be worn to provide a good level of protection.
- Enter the water slowly - this gives marine stingers time to move away.
- Always swim at patrolled beaches, between the red and yellow flags.
- Look for and obey safety signs.
- Don't enter the water when beaches are closed.
- Ask a lifesaver or lifeguard for help and advice if you need it.
- Don't touch stingers washed up on the beach, they can still sting you.



Box Jellyfish Facts

'Chironex fleckeri': Major Box Jellyfish Facts

- 'Chironex fleckeri', also known as the Major Box Jellyfish has the most rapidly acting venom known to science and is capable of killing a person in under 5 minutes.
- Although it is only one of many species of box jellyfish, it has become infamous causing more than 60 deaths in Australia over the last 100 years.
- Box Jellyfish are transparent and pale blue in colour, which makes them pretty much invisible in the water.
- Puffy green bodies with a respectable size: it measures up to 20cm and sometimes larger with up to 12 or more tentacles on each side.
- Each Box Jellyfish has 24 eyes - 6 on each side.
- Tentacles can be up to 3 metres each in length.
- They are speed demons - swims up to 4 knots, that's 1.5 to 2 metres per second. In contrast to true jellyfish that mainly drift.
- Its weight can reach 2 kg - about 2 lbs of milk.
- There are around 12 tentacles on each side and have around 6 billion stinging cells (nematocytes).
- The amount of venom in one animal is enough to kill 60 adult humans.
- The stinging cells of a box jellyfish fire venom into the skin within 3 milliseconds of being triggered - 10 times faster than the inflation of an air bag in a car crash.
- Box jellyfish venom is shot into the body at the rate of 1.5 million G-force. The space shuttle reportedly travels at about 9 G-force.
- Upon being stung the victim will experience immediate severe localized pain (like hot oil being poured on the skin).
- Within minutes red marks appear which may blister later, and the skin may show whip-like lines. Subsequent skin death may lead to permanent scarring.
- A massive dose of venom can cause the heart to beat irregularly and then stop (cardiac arrest) and death within 5 minutes of being stung.
- Around 40 people present to a health care centre in the NT each year with an injury caused by a Box Jellyfish.
- The last 14 stinger deaths in the NT have all been children.
- Children are at greater risk of severe, life threatening stings because of their smaller body mass.

Hand of Death!
Internet Cynical jokes, from the Grubbs "stinger" cartoonists "bait" and use the "year" (instead of "month") and "bait" to lure up the reader.
<http://www.jellyfish.medic8.com.au/papers/boxjellyfish.htm>

Darwin Stingers

Darwin is the Box Jellyfish capital of the world, with numbers along the coast far outstripping anywhere else in Australia.

