



In this regular column, Dr. John Parker, answers medical questions sent to us by our members and other divers.

## Dear DAN Doctor:

Yesterday while diving, I was painfully stung by what looked like a piece of brown/red jellyfish tentacle about the width of a cigarette and a few inches long - or maybe a worm/sea slug.

It was well stuck to my hand, and stung intensely like several cigarette butts being stubbed out on my hand simultaneously. It was very sticky and difficult to remove.

Within one hour, my hand and lower forearm had swollen up so much my watch and computer wouldn't fit. The intense pain subsided slightly into pain & numbness and difficulty in movement over the whole hand.

Today (the following day) a row of red deep puss-filled vesicles cover the stung area, and it is still very painful, though now with some itching in surrounding tissues.

I am in the sea diving maybe 200 time a year, and am familiar with most beasts, but not this one...

So, (1) What was it?; (2) What is the normal treatment / first aid recommended (vinegar etc??). I've gone through the usual fish ID books Doesn't appear to be Box Jelly, Fire worm, Portuguese 'man of war'

Box Jelly has been positively ID'd though by a number of instructors in this area recently.

Regards,

*DAN Member, Thailand.*

## Dr. Parker replies ...

I would guess that this diver had a length of congealed tentacles adhere to his skin. The tentacles sometimes are broken off the jellyfish and as they denature congeal together to form a string. I only know this as one of my sons was stung by a congealed mass of box jellyfish tentacles. He was severely affected and spent a day in intensive care on a morphine drip. I don't know what jellyfish this case might be, but from the intensity of the pain it may well have been one of the box jelly fish family. There are many undocumented species. Probably the tentacles were relatively old so that the symptoms were not long-lasting.

Treatment is to denature the active nematocysts with vinegar then remove the tentacles, seek medical aid and providing CPR if necessary. Some authorities recommend that one should also apply a pressure bandage and immobilise the limb. However, this is currently controversial and must only be done after vinegar has been applied and the tentacles removed.

## The following report recently appeared in a newspaper in Thailand:

A 25 year-old male from Australia and a 23 year-old female, from Switzerland died earlier this month after being stung in waters off Koh Pha Ngan, officials said Wednesday.

The 25 year old male died on 9 Aug 2002 after receiving massive stings to his legs while swimming off the island's Hat Rin beach. He died before arriving at a beach-side clinic, a hospital official said.

A day later, the 23 year old female died from similar stings to her legs after being taken by speedboat to Ban Don Inter Hospital on the nearby island of Koh Samui.

## Dr. John Parker

Dr. Parker is a dive physician, diving instructor and a DAN Oxygen and First Aid Instructor-Trainer. He is the author of **The Sports Diving Medical**, recently released in its second edition.

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