Moon Jellyfish

Upside Down Jellyfish

Photo: FWCC

Jellyfish – Stinging Tentacles

These creatures range in size from tiny to several feet in diameter, with tentacles hanging below. While most jellyfish do not sting, Florida has several species (including those pictured) that sting. Contact with tentacles (even those that have broken off) can cause red, raised streaky welts that can last from 1-2 weeks and cause severe pain, tingling, itching, and even nausea and headache. Do not touch jellyfish that have washed up on the beach; even dead jellies can sting!

Sea Nettle

Portuguese Man-O-War

The main feature of the Portuguese man-o-war is its gas-filled float, a see through blue, pink or violet bulb on the water's surface, and its thin trailing tentacles. These tentacles can be up to 50 feet long and easily break away. Skin contact with the tentacles causes extreme pain and raised whip-like red streaks. Serious exposure can result in breathing difficulties, shock and even death.

Useful Information

- **MARINE STINGS CAN CAUSE LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGIC REACTIONS.** Leave the water immediately if stung. Call the Florida Poison Information Center Network at 1-800-222-1222 or 911 if you begin to have trouble breathing, feel faint or have chest pain.
- **DON'T** use lemon juice, garlic, athlete's foot spray, head lice medicine, Epsom salts, bleach, gasoline or other so-called remedies. Call 1-800-222-1222 to get treatment advice. Most marine stings CAN be effectively treated at home.
- **DON'T** try to remove spines or tentacles with bare fingers. Use tweezers or the edge of a credit card to "shave" them off.
- **DO** ask the lifeguard! Florida lifeguards display a purple flag to warn swimmers of "Dangerous Marine Life." Avoid contact, and see the lifeguard for help if you are stung.
- **DO** contact your doctor if you get a deep or jagged wound while swimming or diving. You may need a tetanus shot.

florida's poison centers
Children's Medical Services

POISON Help
1-800-222-1222

Florida HEALTH

www.floridapoisoncontrol.org

Florida's Marine "Stings & Things"

FLORIDA'S POISON CONTROL CENTERS

Florida Poison Information Center Network

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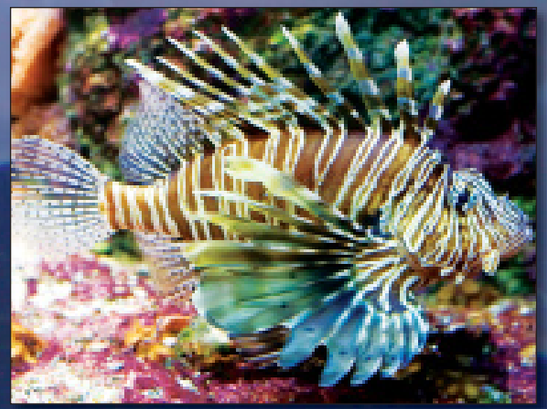
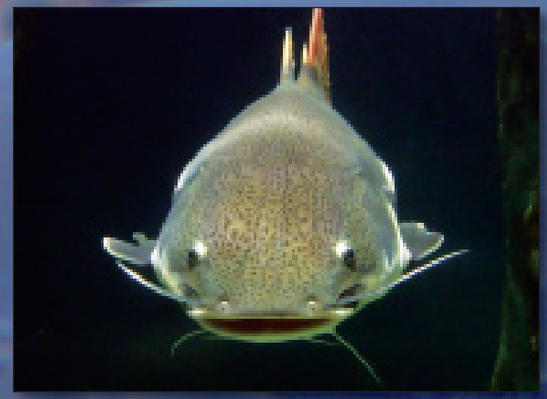


Lionfish – Venomous Spines

This non-native fish lives mainly in deep water reefs and caves. Its colorful stripes and fancy fins make it attractive to divers, but it can be aggressive. Stings are very painful and can cause headache, nausea, confusion and even fainting.

Scorpionfish – Venomous Spines

The scorpionfish is splotchy red or brown and lies in the coral or between rocks. It raises its thick dorsal spines in warning when threatened. The thick spines contain more toxin than those of the lionfish and can go through wetsuit material.

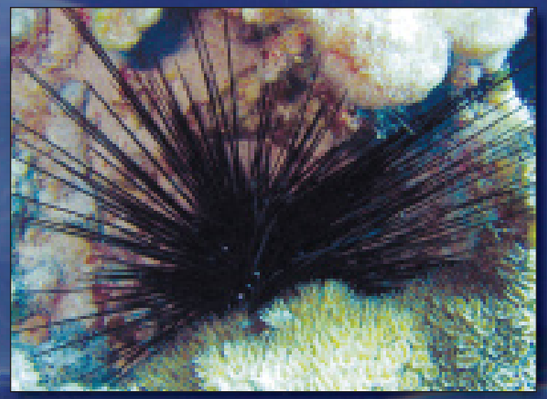


Catfish – Venomous Spines

The venom of the catfish is in the spines on the back and side fins, not in its "whiskers." Stings usually occur on people's hands and feet when they lose their grip on the fish while removing a hook. Spines are very strong and can go through the sole of a shoe. Stings are painful and cause swelling, numbness and, sometimes fainting or reduced heart rate.

Stingray – Venomous Barbed Tail

These shy creatures can cause a jagged and painful wound in the foot or leg if stepped on or threatened. The tail is lined with sharp barbs that contain venom glands. Rarely, a stingray can cause serious harm or even death. Symptoms usually appear within 6-48 hours and can include sweating, difficulty breathing, vomiting and chest pain. Stingrays can lie half buried in the sand on the sea bottom or in the shallows. To avoid stingrays, shuffle your feet as you wade in sandy or murky waters.



Sea Urchin – Venomous Spines

While most sea urchins are not toxic, several in Florida contain venom in their spines, including the Long Spined Urchin and the Black Sea Urchin. While not life threatening, sea urchin stings can be very painful and cause numbness and swelling that extend far from the wound. Sea urchin spines are very hard to get out and a doctor may prescribe antibiotics to prevent infection.

Fire Coral – Stinging Cells

This coral has finger-like branches or flat blades that can be mustard-color, tan or brown with white tips. Contact with bare skin causes a burning pain and red rash within 5-30 minutes. The stinging cells stick to skin and must be removed.

"Swimmer's Itch"

(also known as "Sea Lice")

Baby Jellyfish/Sea Anenomes: These tiny, invisible creatures release stinging cells, usually in areas where a bathing suit rubs against skin. They can also get tangled in hair. The acne-like rash that results causes extreme itching. Wash out all swimsuits with soap and freshwater, or they may continue to spread the rash. The itching usually goes away by itself within 7-10 days. This type of marine sting is common in Florida, especially in early summer.

Flatworm Parasites: These creatures normally live in sea birds and snails, but the tiny larvae can dig into skin and cause an intense itchy rash that can last for up to 14 days. There are no known long term effects.

Harmful Algae Blooms: The algae that causes Florida red tide can cause skin rash, coughing, sneezing and watery eyes, and make shellfish unsafe to eat. Florida red tide can make water turn brown or red and kill fish and birds in the area. Some blue green algae (cyanobacteria) have also been reported to cause rashes and itchy skin after contact with thick blooms in the water. **For updated red tide condition reports or for more detailed information on harmful algae blooms call the Aquatic Toxins Hotline at 1-888-232-8635.**

Other Causes: Sewage spills can release harmful bacteria including *E. Coli, Staphylococcus,* and viruses into the water. These organisms can cause skin rash or eye infection. Chemicals can also cause rashes if dumped into the water near where people swim.