

TROPICAL DIVING:

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *Medications:* consult a physician concerning any medications you should bring, such as antibiotics for infections (Staph, ear, etc).
 - The *Center of Disease Control Travelers' Health* website provides health information at your travel destination: vaccines, diseases and what to bring to help protect yourself: (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm>).
- *Basic First Aid Kit* with a topical ointment, insect repellent
- *Basic Sun Protection:* waterproof sunscreen, wide brim hat, sunglasses
- *Emergency Information:* location and transport means to nearest medical facility, recompression chamber.

The following is a review of the basic first aid for Tropical Diving:

Cuts & Abrasions

- **Signs/Symptoms:** bleeding , redness, swelling, discomfort
- **First Aid:**
 - Control bleeding
 - Scrub inside and around wound with soap and water
 - Remove any visible debris
 - Apply topical antiseptic, cover with sterile dressing and bandage
 - Monitor for allergic reaction and infection
 - *For deep cuts/puncture wound*, press a clean cloth directly of the wound and seek medical attention

Infections

- **Signs/Symptoms:** swelling, redness, pus, foul smell, swollen glands, fever
- **First Aid:** Seek medical attention
- **STAPH / STREP Infection:** The warm ocean water hosts numerous bacteria and *even the slightest abrasion creates an infection risk from bacteria*. Minimize the risk of infection in minor wounds by cleaning any wound properly as soon as the injury occurs

Swimmers Ear (Otitis Externa)

- **Cause:** Frequent immersion causing the cell lining of the ear canal to swell, allowing bacteria under the skin
- **Prevention**
 - Add eardrops after every dive to help prevent infection
 - Keep ear canals cleared of wax buildup
- **Signs/Symptoms:** Ear fullness, itching, pain, fever, swollen lymph nodes
- **First Aid**
 - Add several eardrops into ear canal for 5 min. to inhibit bacterial growth
 - Seek medical attention for severe infection or if ear remains sore/tender
- **Divers Ear Drop Solution**
 - Home Brew: 50:50 white wine vinegar and isopropyl alcohol

Corals or Barnacle Cuts

- **First Aid**
 - Control bleeding
 - Scrub with soap and water
 - Remove any visible debris
 - Cover with sterile dressing and bandage
 - Monitor for allergic reaction and infection
 - Seek medical attention if necessary

Fire Coral, hydroids, Jellyfish, sea wasps, sea anemones

- **Signs/Symptoms:** redness/rash, burning, blisters, swelling
- **First Aid**
 - Flush w/ vinegar (mild acetic acid, baking soda, rubbing alcohol)
 - Flush w/ saline or sea water (NO FRESH WATER)
 - Remove tentacles with tweezers or adhesive tape
 - Shave area and apply hydrocortisone lotion or cream
 - Monitor for infection/ allergic reaction
 - Seek medical attention if necessary

Spine Punctures: Urchin / Crown-of-Thorn Seastar (starfish) / Fish

- **First Aid**
 - Carefully remove visible pieces with tweezers
 - If possible, immerse in hot water (113F/45C max) for 30-90 min
 - Irrigate with water and then scrub with soap and water
 - Apply topical antiseptic and a cover with a sterile dressing or bandage
 - Monitor for infection/ allergic reaction

Lionfish, Scorpionfish and Stonefish (possess spines that transport venom)

- **Signs/Symptoms:** redness, swelling, blistering (lionfish) and extreme pain
- **First Aid**
 - Similar to spine punctures noted above
 - Soaking in hot water may dramatically relieve pain from lionfish
 - Seek medical attention if necessary
 - *Antivenom may be available for stonefish and wound may take weeks to heal*

Cone Shells

- *Never pick up a cone shell on the narrow end*
- **Signs/Symptoms:** pain, numbness, swelling, redness, respiratory distress or arrests, cardiac arrest
- **First Aid:**
 - Immobilize, clean puncture site and apply pressure dressing.
 - Place diver in recovery position, transport to nearest medical facility
 - If safely possible, bring the stinging snail to the emergency room

Sea Snake Bite

- **Signs/Symptoms:** small bite pattern visible, stiffness/aching, respiratory distress, weakness, vomiting
- **First Aid:** Ensure ABC's, control bleeding, monitor for shock and/or allergic reaction, and seek immediate medical attention

Seafood Poisoning

- **Cause:** natural occurring chemicals (marine toxins) can cause illness. One type, *ciguatera poisoning*, is caused by eating contaminated tropical reef fish, especially the higher trophic spp: Barracuda, grouper etc.
- **Signs/Symptoms (onset 15-30min):** abdominal pain, numbness around mouth, tooth pain, headache, dizziness, diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, paralysis muscle/joint aches, chills and fever, itching
- **First Aid:** Ensure ABC's, if responsive induce vomiting and save for analysis, provide O2 and seek medical attention
- *Notify all who may have eaten the same food*