

Jellyfish tentacles contain thousands of small, coiled, stinging cells called nematocysts (see photo below) that act like mini-syringes and inject venom designed to paralyze their prey on contact. The venom irritates human skin causing stinging, burning, redness, blistering, impression patterns, swelling, and itching within seconds to hours. Systemic signs and symptoms include: weakness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, increased salivation, chills, and fever.



Remove any lingering tentacles with gloved hands, tweezers, or forceps then gently scrape the area using a credit card or something similar to remove any lingering nematocysts. Fresh water or pressure will trigger any stored nematocysts. Once the site is clear of both tentacles and stinging cells, soak in hot water (113° F/45° C) for 45 min. Vinegar (4-8% acetic acid solution) inactivates the nematocysts of *some* species and while worsening S/Sx in others. If you are familiar with the species use a mist bottle to soak or gently flush all tentacles and the affected limb with vinegar for at least 45 sec before removing the tentacles; *if unfamiliar with the species, test first*. Air dry and remove any embedded sponge spicules, bristles, or spines with forceps, tweezers, or sticky tape.



Nematocyst

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NOTE: Jellyfish stings may elicit a local or systemic allergic reaction. Be prepared to treat anaphylaxis.

Severe reactions may require a physician to administer a systemic corticosteroid in tapering dose for all severe reactions (60-100 mg prednisone over 14 days). Begin a Level 2 Evacuation for all patients with systemic signs and symptoms.

Common skin reaction from jellyfish stings.

