

Stung by a stonefish? Advice available 24/7

I REFER to the article, "Stung by a stonefish, he is suing Sentosa" (ST, Nov 14). It is unfortunate that Mr Adam Hamzah suffered such ill consequences from a stonefish sting.

In the past 12 months, the Drug & Poison Information Centre (DPIC) has received 23 calls requesting advice on the management of bites and stings from sea creatures, including stonefish, catfish, jellyfish and sting rays. Eleven of these calls were related to stonefish stings.

However, the true incidence of people getting stung by stonefish is unknown, as not all cases get reported.

The stonefish is a carnivorous fish with a row of venomous spines along its back. It has a mottled greenish to mostly brown colour. This enables it to camouflage itself among the rocks in tide pools and shallow waters of tropical seas.

It looks exactly like encrusted rock and feeds on small fish and shrimps. People are usually stung when they step on or catch a stonefish. The sting can cause severe

pain, swelling, muscle weakness, numbness and, in severe cases, shock.

First-aid treatment for a stonefish sting includes washing the affected area with vinegar or seawater, and soaking it in hot (but not scalding) water for 30-90 minutes to ease the pain. Do not cut and suck out the venom as it can lead to a secondary bacterial infection. The victim should then see a doctor for further treatment.

DPIC is a 24-hour, seven-day telephone consultation service that provides timely information and advice on insect and animal bites and stings, as well as information on medications, such as side effects, allergy or interactions with food or other medicine. The hotline is 6423-9119. For first-aid tips and more information, visit the website <http://dpic.sgh.com.sg>

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