



dangerous creatures

cone shell

Distribution

Cone shells are distributed worldwide on coral reefs, particularly under rocks, on lower intertidal and shallow subtidal zones, and some species are also found in temperate zones.

Size and appearance

Cone shells are often brightly coloured with intricate patterns on their ice-cream cone shaped shell, although sometimes the shells are covered by a layer of algal growth. The cone shell can reach up to 23cm in length and have a long proboscis with a venomous harpoon which is used for feeding and in defence.

Symptoms and signs

Cone shell venom attacks the nervous system, leading to neurological symptoms such as weakness, numbness and tingling, muscle paralysis, lack of co-ordination, changes in vision, hearing and speech, and respiratory failure that can lead to death. Other symptoms include intense pain, swelling and nausea. These symptoms can start immediately or can be delayed in onset for days.

First aid

1. Call 000.
2. Emergency care – rescue breathing should be commenced before severe breathing difficulties or blueness of the lips occurs.
3. Pressure-immobilization bandaging of the site – should be left in place until resuscitation facilities are available.
4. Seek medical aid – currently only treatment is intermittent positive pressure ventilation (the use of rescue breathing and oxygen therapy) until the venom has worked its way out of the patient's system with spontaneous breathing usually returning in 3-10 hours.

How to avoid them

Do not pick up any cone shaped shells whether they are washed up on the shore or in the water.

Did you know?

- The harpoon of larger species can penetrate gloves and wetsuits.
- Cone shells are currently being investigated for potential painkilling agents, and in clinical and preclinical trials for use in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and epilepsy.



Conus textile



Distribution in Australian waters



Size relative to human hand



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