

Irritant contact dermatitis from the jellyfish *Rhizostoma pulmo*

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Rhizostoma pulmo is a very common scyphomedusa which usually appears in small swarms on the surface of the Mediterranean Sea during the bathing season. It is in the shape of a large domed-bell which may be opaque or almost transparent, either white or multicoloured. The diameter of the bell varies from 15 to 60 cm (Fig. 1). The dermatotoxicity of *Rhizostoma pulmo* is still in dispute.

Case Report

A 47-year-old man was burned on accidental contact with *Rhizostoma pulmo* while swimming in the coastal waters of the Gulf of Trieste. After contact, he felt an instant cutaneous pain and promptly washed the damaged skin of the arm with seawater. An erythematous, slightly infiltrated eruption appeared on the skin, with subsequent small vesicles (Fig. 2). Despite immediate application of a corticosteroid cream, the lesion lasted for several hours; the pain, which reached its peak a few minutes after the sting, disappeared spontaneously 1½ days later.

Discussion

There are 5 species of jellyfish in the Mediterranean Sea that are dangerous to humans. At present there is no question about the toxicity of *Pelagia noctiluca*, *Chrysaora hysoscella* and *Carybdea marsupialis*, while there is no agreement on the data

available for *Aurelia aurita* and *Rhizostoma pulmo* (1).

Many authors consider *Rhizostoma pulmo* completely harmless to humans. The rare dermatites reported are described as slight erythemas disappearing spontaneously after a few hours (2). In contrast, Eysenhardt reports that this jellyfish produces a burning sensation on the skin and particularly on the lips; Von Zyneck claims that sneezing and rhinorrhea can follow the handling

of dried specimens of *Rhizostoma pulmo*; and Evans reports both urticaria and systemic symptoms following *Rhizostoma pulmo* stings (3).

Our case is the first documented report of irritant contact dermatitis due to *Rhizostoma pulmo* and, in our opinion, this puts an end to the controversy about the dermatotoxicity of *Rhizostoma pulmo* and confirms the toxicity of this kind of jellyfish for man. Moreover, we add that, over the same period of time, we observed



Fig. 1. *Rhizostoma pulmo* in the waters of the Gulf of Trieste.



Fig. 2. The erythematous vesicular eruption of the arm after contact with *Rhizostoma pulmo*.

3 other cases, 1 female and 2 males in all of whom the clinical picture and course of the dermatitis was similar to that described in this report.

References

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