

# Irukandji Jellyfish

## Irukandji Jellyfish

### *Carukia barnesi*

The Irukandji is a small jellyfish with an approximately 2cm diameter bell, that is responsible for an unusual and dramatic syndrome observed following stings in Northern Australia, especially North Queensland. While they are related to the Box Jellyfish, they differ to the large Box Jellyfish in a number of ways.

### Description

The small, translucent Irukandji Jellyfish has a single retractile tentacle, from 50 to 500mm long, hanging from each of the four corners of its bell.

This species has a maximum size of 20-40mm across the body, however different species can reach 60-90mm across. They often have a rectangular body shape (rather than square). Their tentacles can be up to 1 metre in length. The numbers of nematocysts, involved in these stings are very small, but they still hurt the victim immensely.



### Habitat

Irukandji are mostly found north of the Tropic of Capricorn in offshore areas including around reefs and islands but can also be found inshore when onshore currents carry them. At times they may occur in epidemic proportions close to shore.



## Season

Usually Irukandji Jellyfish are found from around November to May, but there have been stings recorded during the entire year in the Cairns region.



## Venom

Even though the size of the Irukandji can be very tiny, it is potentially deadly. The stinging cells operate the same way as the Box jellyfish with nematocysts firing through the skin, but the chemical cocktail is different – slower acting initially, but dramatic and painful for the victim.

## Life Cycle

There is still much to learn about the Irukandji. The life cycle is thought to be similar to the Box Jellyfish, but it may have an offshore breeding cycle rather than a river breeding cycle. More scientific research needs to be done on this dangerous marine stinger.

## Irukandji Syndrome

If you happen to get stung by one of these jellyfish, the initial sting causes a low level irritation, but main symptoms are delayed usually 20 – 30 minutes.

These symptoms are termed Irukandji Syndrome and can cause

- Lower back ache
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Very intense overall body pain
- Sweating
- Goosebumps
- Anxiety

In a small percentage of victims symptoms may include

- Pulmonary oedemas
- Cardiac damage
- Elevated blood pressure

## Precautions

The Irukandji can be so small, the stinger can get through the mesh of a swimming enclosure. Stinger suits should be worn to provide protection. If you think you may have been stung it is best to leave the water immediately and advise someone of your concerns so they can monitor your reactions.

## First Aid

1. Call for help – Dial 000 for ambulance
2. Treat the Sting – pour vinegar onto sting
3. Emergency Care – use CPR if required
4. Seek Medical Assistance – Transport to hospital