



## *Hawaii State Department of Health*

### *Disease Investigation Branch*

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## **Stinging Seaweed Disease** (Lyngbya)

### **What is Stinging Seaweed Disease?**

Stinging seaweed disease is a skin irritation caused by direct exposure to a poisonous type of algae named *Lyngbya majuscula*. The fine, hairlike, dark-brown seaweed, commonly known as lyngbya, is found in tropical and subtropical marine and estuarine environment worldwide, including Hawaiian shoreline. *Lyngbya* produces toxins and being exposed to toxins causes symptoms.

### **How do you get it?**

You can get stinging seaweed disease by direct exposure to the seaweed while swimming or wading in areas where the seaweed grows. *Lyngbya* can get under the swimsuit next to the skin and produce a rash, usually, but not always, in areas covered by the swimsuit. There have been reported that windblown *Lyngbya* cause symptoms on face when people walked on the beach during strong winds.

### **What are the symptoms of Stinging Seaweed Disease?**

Symptoms include itching/irritation of skin rash and/or blister formation. Other symptoms include swollen eyes, irritation of the nose and throat, skin sores, oral and intestinal irritation, headache, fatigue, fever. The rash frequently appears in the genital and anal areas. In men with genital (sex organ) involvement, swelling of the scrotum is common.

### **When do symptoms start?**

Symptoms may begin several minutes to several hours after exposure to the algae, and typically last 4 to 48 hours. In more serious cases, skin sores may appear, which can last up to 12 days.

### **What is the treatment for Stinging Seaweed Disease?**

The rash can be treated as a sunburn using wet towels and soothing creams may be used to alleviate symptoms. If the reaction is severe, steroid treatment may be required.

If wound get infected, antibiotic treatment may be needed.

### **How do you keep from getting it?**

The only sure way to avoid stinging seaweed disease is to avoid swimming in the ocean. However, if you choose to swim in the ocean, avoid waters where stinging seaweed has been reported.

Shower or bathe with lots of soap and water promptly after swimming. Thoroughly wash swimsuits, towels, and any associated swim gear to get rid of any attached algae.

For more information, see DOH web site:

[http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease\\_listing/stinging-seaweed-disease/](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/stinging-seaweed-disease/)