

STINGRAY INCIDENT AT PENANG BEACH AN ISOLATED CASE, NO CLUSTERS REPORTED - DOF

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GEORGE TOWN, Jan 7 (Bernama) -- The Penang Department of Fisheries (DOF) has described the incident in which a boy was stung by a pale-edged stingray at a beach in the state as an isolated case, noting that such occurrences are rare and that Pantai Tanjung Asam has not seen repeated reports or clusters in recent years.

Its director Zarina Zainuddin said Pantai Tanjung Asam was not classified as a high-risk area for pale-edged stingrays, as sightings of the species in the area were infrequent.

However, she said her department had taken note of the incident involving the 10-year-old boy, who was stung while bathing at the beach, and that regular monitoring would continue to ensure the safety of visitors.

"Pale-edged stingrays are a group of species from the Dasyatidae family. They are usually more active and approach shallow coastal areas during the hot season and monsoon transition, when water temperatures and wave conditions are suitable for feeding or breeding. But their presence is difficult to predict

"In addition, changes in sea currents that bring nutrients or small organisms such as shrimp and small fish, human activities including uncontrolled disposal of food or aquaculture waste, as well as water turbidity and seabed structures like corals, which serve as natural habitats, are all factors that attract pale-edged stingrays to coastal areas," she said when contacted by Bernama.

Zarina explained that stingray venom is found in the barbs on the tail and consists of a complex mixture of thermolabile proteins that can decompose when exposed to heat.

She said that the toxin may produce dual effects, including local reactions such as inflammation, swelling, and tissue necrosis at the sting site, which are typically slow to heal and prone to infection.

In more serious cases, Zarina said, the victim may experience muscle spasms, low blood pressure (hypotension), vomiting, and heart arrhythmia.

"The pale-edged stingray's venom is not produced in a specific gland like snakes, but is contained in the epithelial tissue (skin sheath) covering the barbs on its tail. When the barbs pierce the victim's skin, their sheath ruptures and releases the toxin directly into the wound," she said.

She therefore advised parents and beachgoers to avoid muddy, silty, or rocky areas that could serve as hiding places for pale-edged stingrays, not to touch unfamiliar marine life, and to keep a

close watch on children at the beach.

Zarina said that when stung, the affected part should be placed in hot water at around 45 degrees Celsius, or as hot as possible, for 30 to 90 minutes to lessen pain and neutralise the venom.

“However, if a stingray barb pierces a critical area like the chest or stomach, the victim should not attempt to remove it and must seek immediate medical treatment at a hospital,” she said.

Zarina stressed that the Fisheries Department is committed to monitoring the marine ecosystem and would continue working with relevant parties to raise public awareness about dangerous marine life.

In the incident at around 5pm on Jan 3, Zaeed Khan Wazir Khan was rushed to Penang Hospital after being stung by a pale-edged while bathing at Pantai Tanjung Asam, Gertak Sanggul, near Balik Pulau.

The boy was discharged after two days of treatment but continued to require observation, as he was still exhibiting a mild fever.

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TAG: Zarina Zainuddin, Fisheries department, pale-edged stingray, Pantai Tanjung Asam

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