

# Top alert over lethal jellyfish

By CHRIS HINGSTON

SWIMMERS are being advised to be vigilant against the potentially lethal irukandji jellyfish, following a spate of stings and regular beach closures over the Christmas and New Year period.

The 2009-10 stinger season is shaping up to be the worst in recent years, with multiple sting victims fronting at Broome Hospital in the weeks since Cyclone Laurence.

Broome Hospital senior medical officer Dr Sue Phillips said in one day four people were admitted with irukandji stings and there was a brief period after the cyclone where the hospital was seeing at least two patients reporting irukandji stings everyday.

Dr Phillips said both locals and tourists were being stung, with a high number of children among the victims.

No patient had required transport to Perth and all admitted to the hospital had been released within 24 hours, she said.

Symptoms – which occur about 30 minutes after a sting – include severe pains, high blood pressure, sweating and a sense of impending doom, Dr Phillips said.

She said the irukandji venom “packs a powerful punch” and urged those stung to apply vinegar as first aid and get to hospital as soon as possible.

Two deaths have been recorded in Australia from irukandji stings, both in Queensland waters.

The irukandji jellyfish are less than 2cm in diameter and are most active in Broome waters during the wet season months.

In the last two stinger seasons Broome Hospital recorded three patients admitted with irukandji stings, while in the 2006-07 season



Broome shire ranger Mark Golding said swimmers need to pay attention to stinger warning signs.

nine inpatient admissions were recorded.

No irukandji stings have been reported at Cable Beach this season, but Town Beach and Entrance Point have both been

closed repeatedly by Broome Shire rangers due to the jellyfish.

Broome Shire ranger Mark Golding advised swimmers and surfers to take precautions against the irukandji and not to

ignore the warning signs.

“People need to be more vigilant of stings – the warning signs are up and people are still going into the water ... people have to take the signs seriously,” he said.