



First Aid

for Underwater Divers with "Decompression Sickness"

A collaborative Publication of the

Sri Lanka Medical Association and the Directorate of
Health Services of the Sri Lanka Navy

This document has been prepared for the use of SCUBA divers, boatmen and others, including life savers, who may be called upon to care for a diver with Decompression Sickness (bends). It is very important that first aid care should commence as soon as a diving-related condition is suspected — therefore other occupants of the dive boat used by the victim should be familiar with these recommendations.

The only effective recommended treatment for Decompression Sickness is with oxygen at high pressure in a recompression chamber. This form of treatment is available only through the Navy Hospital in Trincomalee. If it is not possible to enter this hospital as soon as possible, patients should be admitted to the nearest hospital for necessary preliminary treatment until arrangements can be made to enter the Navy Hospital.

FIRST AID FOR DIVERS WITH "DECOMPRESSION SICKNESS"(DCS)

1. Keep lying flat.
2. Recovery position (left lateral) if unconscious.
3. Reassure, encourage to keep calm and still.
4. Protect against cold, remove wet clothes, cover with blanket.
5. Encourage plenty of non-alcoholic fluids by mouth if fully conscious.
6. Carry victim from the boat to shore and keep lying flat.
7. Use a tight-fitting mask to provide 100% oxygen in spells of 20 minutes, with 5 minutes on air in between, starting as soon as possible.
8. Admit to the Navy Hospital, Trincomalee **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Ring 026-7766100** (Navy Hospital) **or 026-7508153** (Diving Unit) to arrange admission for recompression chamber treatment.
9. Otherwise, admit to a nearby hospital and inform the doctor and hospital staff that symptoms are likely to result from diving too deep for too long. Ask the hospital staff to contact diving medical officer of Sri Lanka Navy.

[A downloadable pdf '*Guide to Management of Decompression Sickness*' - for hospital doctors, is available at <https://slma.lk/guidelines/>]



DO NOT ADMINISTER OXYGEN UNDERWATER BELOW 9 METERS

Hospital treatment while awaiting high pressure oxygen therapy consists of: insertion of a urinary catheter if the patient is unable to pass urine, administering intravenous saline and continuing oxygen through a tight-fitting (anaesthetic type) face-mask — in periods of 20 minutes O₂ interrupted by 5 minutes breathing air.

Someone who can describe the dive profile — number of cylinders used, duration at bottom, surface intervals — and time interval between surfacing and onset of symptoms as well as what was done afterwards should accompany the patient — especially to the Navy Hospital

Common symptoms of Decompression Sickness (DCS)

- Joint or back pains
- Nausea, Vomiting
- Numbness in limbs or trunk
- Loss of balance
- Altered sensation
- Skin rash
- Weakness
- Visual disturbances
- Tingling in extremities
- Undue fatigue
- Urinary retention

“DCS” HELP HOTLINE

Need advice? Answers to questions?

Ring one of the following at any time:

Dr. Dinesh Ariyadewa – 076 3061880 / 0718670970

Dr Dhananjana Kodituwakku 0763865784

Dr. Lahiru Nawagamuwa - 0712 424352

Dr. AH Mullegama – 0767517185

Dr. Malik Fernando - 077 7678606

Edited by

Malik Fernando, Sajith Edirisinghe, AH Mullegama, and Dinesh Ariyadewa for the Sri Lanka Medical Association and the Directorate of Health Services of the Sri Lanka Navy.

2nd Edition - April 2024

ISBN 978-624-5972-11-1

Published by

The Sri Lanka Medical Association
'Wijerama House', No 6, Wijerama Mawatha, Colombo 7.