



From Monsoons to Microbes: Understanding the Ocean's Role in Human Health

*Committee on the Ocean's Role in Human Health, Ocean Studies Board, Environment and Resources
Commission on Geosciences, National Research Council*

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What can sharks teach us about our immune system? What can horseshoe crabs show us about eyesight?

The more we learn about the ocean, the more we realize how critical these vast bodies of water are to our health and well-being. Sometimes the ocean helps us, as when a marine organism yields a new medical treatment. At other times, the ocean poses the threat of coastal storm surges or toxic algal blooms.

From Monsoons to Microbes offers a deeper look into the oceans that surround us, often nurturing yet sometimes harming humankind. This book explores the links among physical oceanography, public health, epidemiology, marine biology, and medicine in understanding what the ocean has to offer. It will help readers grasp such important points as:

- How the ocean's sweeping physical processes create long-term phenomena such as El Nino and short-term disastrous events such as tsunamis--including what communities can do to prepare.
- What medicines and nutritional products have come from the ocean and what the prospects are for more such discoveries.
- How estuaries work--where salt and fresh water meet--and what can go wrong, as in the 7,000 square mile "dead zone" at the out-flow of the Mississippi River.
- How the growing demand for seafood and the expansion of ocean-going transport has increased our exposure to infectious agents--and how these agents can be tracked down and fought.
- Why "red tides" of toxic algae suddenly appear in previously unaffected coastal areas, and what happens when algal toxins find their way into our food supply or the air we breathe.

The book recommends ways we can implement exciting new technologies to monitor the physics, chemistry, and biology of the ocean to recognize change as it happens. From the impact of worldwide atmospheric warming to the significance of exotic bacteria from submarine hydrothermal vents, the ocean has many depths left to explore.

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