

# Big Isle woman recounts encounter with shark

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Carla Christensen was heading back to shore from a quick swim at Puako Beach on Hawaii island late Sunday afternoon when a shark bit her left leg.

She tried to fend it off with her large fins, but the 8- to 10-foot predator took a bite out of her ankle and then slammed up against her.

"I'm doing much better," Christensen said by phone Tuesday. "I realized I dodged a bullet on that one."

The 70-year-old Puako woman managed to get to shore on her own, where an off-duty Ocean Safety employee helped control the bleeding until Emergency Medical Services arrived and took her to a hospital.

A doctor applied a "ringlet" of staples around her ankle to close the bite wounds, which were a half-

inch wide in some places. Her tendons were damaged but not severed.

Christensen's close call was the third such incident in Hawaii waters this year, according to the Department of Land and Natural Resources. On June 1 a surfer off Davidson's Beach at Kekaha, Kauai, was nipped on the hand, and on Feb. 5 a shark clamped onto the back end of a stand-up paddleboard off Kihai, Maui.

Sunday's incident happened when Christensen, an environmental scientist with a background in biology, was swimming at about 4:30 p.m. in the channel just south of Hapuna Beach in Waikoloa, near where the Mauna Lani Resort has been releasing young turtles as part of its Malama Honu program.

"I have a strong suspicion that the shark was just coasting that area for young turtles," said Christensen,



COURTESY CARLA CHRISTENSEN

**Carla Christensen shows the bite marks on her fin as she sits in a chair with a boot on her left foot, which was bitten Saturday by a shark.**

who has been snorkeling there for 25 years but had never seen a shark before.

"They're used to picking off these little turtles."

She said she had "a bad feeling" about the murky-

ness of the ocean there and was in about 10 feet of water when the shark struck.

"I was kicking so hard, it didn't get a good grip on my foot," she said. "I had these big fins in its face. I just kept



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**A woman was bitten by a shark while snorkeling.**

my fins between it and me. A lot of pretty big predators don't want to get hurt."

Robert Johnson, 47, says he dives at Puako regularly and spotted an 8- to 9-foot tiger shark there Aug. 21.

"I was within 20 feet of it, and I could clearly see the stripes," he said.

"Since Aug. 14 there've been multiple sightings, and all agree it's about the same size," Johnson said.

He noted that visibility at Puako is typically half of what it is at other Hawaii beaches. Johnson also mentioned that a few people on a Facebook discussion about Christensen's shark encounter noted that willow trees are in bloom, referring to a traditional Native Hawaiian observation signaling an increased risk of shark attacks.

There is some scientific evidence that female tiger sharks' migration from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to the main islands dovetails with the pupping season from September to early November, when the willow trees are in bloom.

Christensen said she wanted to share her story so people would know a shark bite isn't always fatal and that the recovery isn't so bad, at least in her case.

The doctor ordered no house chores, "just lying around. That's the upside," she laughed.