

# How to Swim Safely in the Ocean or at the Beach

## Beach Safety Tips for Kids & Adults – The American Red Cross

### Be Aware of Hazards & Weather

*Being water competent in the ocean requires stronger and different skills than in a pool. Whenever you are at the beach, ocean or other open water environment, watch and prepare for:*

- Changing tides.
- Fast-moving currents and waves, even in shallow water.
- Drop-offs that unexpectedly change water depth.
- Unexpected changes in air or water temperature.
- Hazards, such as underwater obstacles, rocks and debris.
- Vegetation, marine animals and fish.
- Other people's activities in the same waters, such as boating.
- Thunder & Lightning.
  - Leave the water immediately, if swimming off shore.
  - If you're out in a boat, head back to shore as quickly as possible.
  - If you're unable to get to shore, lie down in the bottom of the boat or shelter in the cabin if available.

### Establish and Enforce Rules and Safe Behaviors

- Enter the water feet first for your safety!
- Always enter unknown or shallow water cautiously.
- Only dive in water clearly marked as safe for diving, at least 9 feet deep with no underwater obstacles. Never dive head first into surf!
- Do not enter the water from a height, such as a bridge or boat.
- Be careful when standing to prevent being knocked over by currents or waves.
- Swim sober.
- Supervise others sober and without distractions, such as reading or talking on or using a cell phone.
- Swim with a buddy even in lifeguarded areas.

### Take These Water Safety Steps

- Employ layers of protection including barriers to prevent access to water, life jackets, and close supervision of children to prevent drowning.
- Ensure every member of your family learns to swim so they at least achieve skills of water competency: able to enter the water, get a breath, stay afloat, change position, swim a distance then get out of the water safely.

- Know what to do in a water emergency – including how to help someone in trouble in the water safely, call for emergency help and CPR.

## Be Aware of the Dangers of Rip Currents

*Responsible for most rescues performed by lifeguards, rip currents can form in any large open water area (including the Great Lakes), such as low spots and breaks in sandbars, or near structures such as jetties and piers.*

### How to Avoid Rip Currents

- Check conditions before entering the water: are any warning flags up? Ask a lifeguard about water conditions, beach conditions, and potential hazards.
- While in the water, stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist near these structures.

### How to Escape from a Rip Current

- If you are caught in a rip current, stay calm and don't fight it.
- Swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current. Then, turn and swim to shore.
- Alternately, float or tread water until you are free of the rip current and then head to shore.
- If you can't make it to shore, draw attention to yourself by waving and calling for help.

### If Someone Else Is Caught in a Rip Current

- If someone is in trouble in the water, get help from a lifeguard.
- If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1.
- Throw the victim something that floats – such as a lifejacket, cooler or inflatable ball – and yell instructions on how to escape the current. Do not attempt a rescue yourself unless you are a trained beach lifeguard.