

# How to Swim Safely in Rivers and Other Natural Environments

## Be Aware of Hazards & Weather

Being water competent in natural water requires additional knowledge and skills than in the pool. Whenever you are near a lake, river, stream or other natural water environment, watch and prepare for:

- Unexpected changes in air or water temperature.
- Thunder & lightning.
  - Leave the water immediately.
  - Stay inside an enclosed area for at least 30 minutes after the last thunder clap.
  - If outside, avoid open areas, tall, isolated trees and metal objects.<sup>1</sup>
- Fast-moving currents, waves and rapids, even in shallow water.
- Hazards, such as dams, underwater obstacles, or rocks and debris.
- Vegetation, animals and fish.
- Drop-offs that can unexpectedly change water depth.
- Other people's activities in the same waters, such as boating.

## Establish and Enforce Rules and Safe Behaviors

- Enter the water feet first for your safety!
- Always enter unknown or shallow water cautiously.
- Dive only in water clearly marked as safe for diving, at least 9 feet deep with no underwater obstacles.
- 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.

## 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.

Courtesy of The American Red Cross, [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)