

Beach Safety

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Understanding the ocean is very important - the more you know about how waves, wind and tides affect conditions in the water, the better able you are to keep yourself safe, or even rescue others, from danger. Recognising danger signs and awareness of surf conditions is an essential part of lifesaving.

Beach flags (red and yellow flags)

Red and yellow patrol flags on a beach mark the safest area to swim when an active lifesaving patrol is on the beach. Swim between the red and yellow flags, and at a beach patrolled by lifesavers. Never swim at unpatrolled beaches.

Setting up the red and yellow patrol flags

Each day, before a lifesaving patrol begins, the lifesavers or professional lifeguards on duty enter the water to find where the rips, currents, rocks and other hazards are located. They then identify the safest area to swim. Two red and yellow patrol flags then mark this area. Depending on the water conditions, the distance between patrol flags can vary. The area also needs to be a manageable size.

Remember the **F-L-A-G-S** and Stay Safe:

F – Find the flags and swim between them - the red and yellow flags mark the safest place to swim at the beach.

L – Look at the safety signs - they help you identify potential dangers and daily conditions at the beach.

A – Ask a surf lifesaver for some good advice - surf conditions can change quickly so talk to a surf lifesaver or lifeguard before entering the water.

G – Get a friend to swim with you - so you can look out for each other's safety and get help if needed. Children should always be supervised by an adult.

S – Stick your hand up for help - if you get into trouble in the water, stay calm, and raise your arm to signal for help. Float with a current or rip - do not try and swim against it.

Marine Life (North Queensland)

When visiting Australian beaches, particularly those in the tropical North Queensland, it is important to be aware of marine life such as Stingers. A marine Stinger (also known as a Jelly Fish or Blue Bottle) is an animal that lives in the ocean that may sting you if its tentacles come into contact with your body. Stingers do not attack people, however it is important to keep your distance whilst in the ocean and walking along the shore. The Stinger season is from November to March each year.

Please remember:

- Swim at beaches that are patrolled by lifeguards and always swim between the red and yellow flags
- Observe warning signs - don't swim when beaches are closed
- During stinger season many beaches in Tropical North Queensland have stinger-resistant enclosures (stinger nets) to help protect swimmers from jellyfish. Stinger nets help protect swimmers but cannot stop them. Some stingers may still be in the enclosure. Do not touch the stinger nets
- During stinger season you should wear protective clothing (wet suit or lycra 'stinger suit') when swimming in the sea (beach and reef)
- Enter water slowly so that you can see what is in the water.

Many beaches provide a bottle of household vinegar. If you are stung, pour vinegar on the sting and then seek medical attention from the lifeguard on duty (do not pour vinegar in your eyes).

Irukandji is a tiny and extremely venomous jellyfish. Symptoms for this sting may take 20-60 minutes to develop. If in doubt, follow the first aid priorities and seek medical advice.

Do not enter the water where crocodiles may live. There are sometimes warning signs beside the creek or beach front to remind you that you shouldn't swim there or go near the edge of the creek. If the creek is muddy, you probably should not swim there, even if there isn't a warning sign.

<http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/global/live-in-australia/health-and-safety/sun-and-water>

Negotiating the Surf

Before entering the surf, always make note of a landmark such as a building or headland that can be seen from the water and used as a guide for maintaining a fixed position. Also check the depth of any gutter and the height of any sandbank before diving under waves – this will help prevent spinal injury.

When going out through the surf, negotiate the shallows by a high hurdle type of stride until the breakers reach your waist or until your progress is slowed.

Warning signs

Try to remember these warning signs, they are located in places where there is potential danger, and to protect you:

Prohibition (Activity not allowed) Signs

These are clearly marked by a red circle with a slash on white background with a black pictogram. Activities pictured with this type of sign are prohibited.

Hazard Signs

These are marked by a yellow diamond sign with a black pictogram, this type of sign identifies danger or a potential dangerous situation

Rips

Australia has many wonderful and famous surf beaches but these can be extremely dangerous.

A rip is a strong current running out to sea. Rips are the cause of most rescues performed at beaches. A rip usually occurs when a channel forms between the shore and a sandbar, and large waves have built up water which then returns to sea, causing a drag effect. The larger the surf is the stronger the rip can be. Rips are dangerous as they can carry a weak or tired swimmer out into deep water.

Identifying a Rip

The following features will alert you to the presence of a rip:

- darker colour, indicating deeper water
- murky brown water caused by sand stirred up off the bottom
- smoother surface with much smaller waves, alongside white water (broken waves)
- waves breaking further out to sea on both sides of the rip
- debris floating out to sea
- a rippled look, when the water around is generally calm

Escaping from a Rip

If you are caught in a rip:

- Don't Panic - stay calm
- Raise your arm to signal for help
- If you are a strong swimmer, swim at a 45-degree angle across the rip and in the same direction as the current until you reach the breaking wave zone, then return to shore

- If you are a weak or tired swimmer, float with the current, don't fight it. Swim parallel to the shore for about 30 - 40m until you reach the breaking wave zone, then swim back to shore or signal for help
- Remember to stay calm and conserve your energy.

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Swimming Pool Safety

Your local swimming pool provides the ideal safe swimming environment. Not only is the water quality controlled to meet Health regulations, it is patrolled by qualified Pool Lifeguards.

- Always obey the pool's safety rules and listen to the instructions of pool lifeguards. They are there to assist you.
- Play it safe. Always walk around the pool rather than run as surfaces may be slippery when wet, and remember to check for others before entering the water.
- Never take your eyes off children or non-swimmers if they are with you.

While beaches and public swimming pools are generally patrolled by lifeguards, it is your responsibility to take care near water where you want to swim, particularly where there is no patrol. Whether you are an experienced swimmer, or are just learning, water conditions can be hazardous in unfamiliar places. Apply good judgement when approaching water.

Also remember:

- Don't swim directly after a meal
- Don't swim under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Don't run and dive in the water
- Check that it's okay to swim before you enter the water, conditions change regularly
- Be Sun Smart - use 30+ sunscreen, wear a long-sleeve shirt and broad brimmed hat to prevent cancer-causing sunburn
- If the water is murky or unclear – you cannot see the bottom – do not dive in
- Even if you have visited a beach or river before and you feel familiar with the conditions, do not assume that it will be the same there on another visit. Beach and river conditions change daily, and you should always approach cautiously
- Never swim at night.

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