



Rip Current Safety

How to Safely Navigate Rough Water

What is the Problem?

There is nothing better than a day at the beach, however, swimming in a natural body of water can be risky. More than 100 people die each year from rip-current related drownings.¹ Rip currents, which are prevalent along most US coastlines, are powerful, narrow channels of water moving in the offshore direction and are responsible for 80 percent of all rescues in the surf environment.² Rip currents can occur along any coastline with breaking waves and can pull swimmers away from the shore into deeper water at speeds of up to eight feet per second.³



Who is at Risk?

The risk of drowning varies among population groups.⁴ The highest risk of drowning for both males and females occurs between ages 1 to 4.⁵ The risk of drowning decreases for both sexes from ages 5 to 14, and then increases substantially at age 15, remaining elevated throughout adulthood.⁶ Among Black and Hispanic Americans, the risk of drowning increases between the ages of 15-19.⁷

Prevention Tips

Rip currents can occur at any time, so it's important to keep your family safe by following these safety tips:

- Learn recognizable characteristics of a rip current: choppy channel of water in a churning motion, line of sea foam that is moving steadily out to sea, and disrupted patterns of incoming waves.⁸
- If you get caught in a rip current don't panic. If possible, swim sideways, parallel to the beach, until you feel that you are out of the rip current. If you cannot, let the current carry you until it dies out, and tread water until help arrives.⁹
- Heed the safety warning flags posted along the beach and waterways for safety.¹⁰
- Learn to swim and never swim alone – use the buddy system.¹¹
- Know the weather. Different weather patterns can have an effect on ocean activity.¹²
- Avoid using alcohol before or during any swimming activity.¹³



Plan of the Week (POW):

Watch for dangerous waves and signs of rip currents **BEFORE** you enter the water. These signs include water that is discolored and unusually choppy, foamy, or filled with debris as well a clear break in incoming wave patterns.¹⁴ If you are caught in a rip current, stay calm and swim parallel to the shore.¹⁵ Once out of the current, swim toward the shore at an angle.¹⁶ If you are unable to escape the current, tread water, face the shore and wave your hands for help.¹⁷ Remember, **ALWAYS** heed colored beach warning flags and keep an eye on the local weather to remain safe when enjoying the beach environment.¹⁸

References

- 1,2,8,9 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Rip currents: don't get pulled in. http://www.noaa.gov/features/monitoring_0609/ripcurrent.html. Accessed 15 September 2013.
- 3-7,10-18 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Drowning Risks in Natural Water Settings. <http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsdrowningrisks/>. Updated 13 June 2012. Accessed 14 September 2013.

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<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/ssd/techmemo/sr210.htm>

NMCPHC Injury Prevention and Violence Free Living Webpage

<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/injury-violence-free-living/Pages/injury-violence-free-living.aspx>

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