

27

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



Royal Life Saving
ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY - AUSTRALIA

FACT SHEET No.27

Beach Safety



Q. How safe are Australian beaches?

A. Going to the beach is a popular pastime in Australia, but it can be a dangerous place. On average, one person has drowned every week at an Australian beach for the last 5 years and on average 10 people are rescued every day. International tourists and those who are unfamiliar with the beach are at a greater risk of drowning.

Q. What hazards are there at Australian beaches?

A. There are a number of dangers at Australian beaches. These include: rips, tidal and runback currents, waves, drop offs, sand bars, marine stingers, submerged objects, other people and surf craft.

Q. What is a rip and how do I recognise one?

A. Rips are one of the most common hazards at Australian beaches. Rips are fast-flowing currents where the water flows out in the direction that causes the least resistance. Recognising a rip is the first step in being able to avoid being caught in one. To recognise a rip look for discoloured water, brown in colour due to sand being stirred from the bottom, foam on the surface that extends beyond the breaking waves, a ripple appearance when the water around is generally calm, debris floating with the current and waves breaking larger and further out on both sides of the rip.

Q. What do I do if I'm caught in a rip?

A. If you are caught in a rip, do not panic, remain calm. If you are a poor or non-swimmer then you should go with the rip, float and wave and wait to be rescued. If you are a weak or tired swimmer then you should swim parallel to the shore and then return to shore when conditions allow. If you are a strong swimmer you should either swim parallel to the shore or angle your body diagonally across the current, returning to the shore through the breaking waves.

Q. What can I do to keep myself safe at the beach?

A. When at the beach you should always swim between the red and yellow flags. Never swim at unpatrolled beaches and never swim alone. If you do get into trouble, don't panic, float and wave and wait to be rescued. Be aware of your limitations and evaluate your skills and fitness at a safe environment such as a public pool prior to swimming at the beach, to make sure you're physically capable of swimming in the surf. Refrain from drinking alcohol before swimming and never swim at night.

Q. I'm worried about being stung at the beach, what do I do?

A. To keep yourself safe, wearing a stinger suit (neck to ankles) or a rash vest, swim in areas which are surrounded by stinger nets, heed warning signs, swim at patrolled beaches, use caution entering the water, avoid swimming at beaches during stinger season if possible (usually September to May) and supervise children as they are more vulnerable to stings.

Beach Safety Checklist:

- Always swim at patrolled beaches
- Always actively supervise children within arms' reach at the beach
- Read beach safety signs on arrival at the beach
- Ask the lifeguard for advice about beach conditions
- Always swim between the red and yellow flags
- Always swim with another person – never swim alone
- Do not enter the water if there are doubts about the ability to cope with the conditions
- Beware of digging deep sand holes – the sides can become unstable and collapse
- If swimming at an area where crocodiles may be present, please look for signage and only swim in designated safe swimming areas. If there is no sign, do not swim in the area
- Protect yourself from the sun and stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water

**ALWAYS SWIM
BETWEEN THE FLAGS AT
PATROLLED BEACHES**

ROYAL LIFE SAVING HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF
FACT SHEETS ON WATER SAFETY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA.

Contact Royal Life Saving on: **1300 737 763**
or download them from: **www.keepwatch.com.au**

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