



Rip Current Safety



The very mention of rip currents conjures terror in many people, but in general, if you can swim or float, rips are not dangerous per se. A rip current will not pull you under. Rather it's the fear that rips engender that causes panic, and panic is the cause of most serious incidents. If you aren't a strong and confident swimmer, stick to lifeguarded beaches.

To reiterate: Panicking is the most dangerous thing you can do when in a tricky situation in the water!!!

Where there are breaking waves, there are usually rip currents and on surf beaches there will certainly be some fairly hefty rips if conditions are right. Other coastal features such as headlands, estuary mouths, or groynes might also be associated with rips at certain times.

WHAT ARE RIP CURRENTS?

Rip currents don't are outflowing currents of water that can pull people hundreds to thousands of yards away from shore and out to sea. As longshore currents move on and off the beach, "rip currents" may form around low spots or breaks in sandbars, and also near structures such as jetties and piers. A rip is a current (it's not a tide). Where waves are bringing water into shore, that water must return to a level. So, in simple terms a rip current is a river of water which takes the water from breaking waves back out to sea.

Rip currents typically reach speeds of 1 to 2 feet per second. However, some rip currents have been measured at 8 feet per second—faster than any Olympic swimmer ever recorded. If wave activity is slight, several low rip currents can form, in various sizes and velocities. But in heavier wave action, fewer, more concentrated rip currents can form. Rip currents can be very narrow or more than 50 yards wide. Sometimes a rip current ends just beyond the line of breaking waves; however, others may continue to flow hundreds of yards offshore.

WHY ARE RIP CURRENTS DANGEROUS?

- Rip currents pull people away from shore.
- Rip current speeds can vary from moment to moment and can quickly increase to become dangerous to anyone entering the surf.
- Rip currents can sweep even the strongest swimmer away from shore.
- A scientific review of data provided to the United States Lifesaving Association found that there are over 100 deaths each year in the U.S. attributed to rip currents.
- Rip currents account for over 80% of rescues performed by surf beach lifeguards.

HOW TO AVOID RIP CURRENTS:

You can never, ever be sure that you won't be caught in a rip, but avoiding rips will help you to minimize the risk. Counter-intuitively, if it's surfy, stay in the area of rough white water. The flatter, calmer areas are usually rips!

LEARN TO SPOT A RIP CURRENTS:

- Area of calmer water, usually it's not white water, with much lower or no waves.
- A difference in watercolor. A narrow gap of darker, seemingly calmer water between areas of breaking waves and whitewater.
- A channel of churning, choppy water. May have a rippled surface.
- May be cloudy with sand/silt
- A line of foam, seaweed or debris moving seaward.

Ask local lifeguards and surfers to help you spot the rips. They will also be able to tell you where they are most likely to be. Some will be "fixed" (there most of the time, e.g. along headlands) and others move over weeks or months with sand bars or appear suddenly and unpredictably as "flash" rips. Stand and watch rips, it takes practice to be able to see them. Learn how!

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND MY FAMILY FROM RIP CURRENTS?

- Always swim in an area protected by lifeguards
- Consult lifeguards before entering the water.
- Assume that rip currents are always present at surf beaches.
- Learn to swim in the surf and make sure your children can swim in the surf. Pool swimming is not the same as swimming at a surf beach.
- Learn to identify rip currents and take the time to evaluate the water before you enter the water.

WHAT TO DO IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT:

Flash Rips can occur at any time, so one minute you're standing happily in foamy waves and the next you're heading out to sea at speed. A gentle rip might suddenly pulse and speed up. What do you do if this happens and you're not a confident and experienced sea swimmer?

Firstly, **DON'T PANIC!!!** Float (if possible, on your back), and take a series of slow, calming breaths.

DON'T TRY TO SWIM BACK AGAINST THE RIP. Continue to float and concentrate on your breathing.

IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT...KNOW YOUR OPTIONS:

- Relax, rip currents don't pull you under.
- Don't swim against the current.
- You may be able to escape by swimming out of the current in a direction following the shoreline, or toward breaking waves, then at an angle toward the beach.
- You may be able to escape by floating or treading water if the current circulates back toward shore.
- If you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself. If you need help, yell and wave for assistance.

IF YOU SEE SOMEONE IN TROUBLE...

- Don't become a victim while trying to help someone else! Many people have died trying to rescue rip current victims.
- Get help from a lifeguard.
- If a lifeguard is not present, call 9-1-1, then try to direct the victim to swim following the shoreline to escape.
- If possible, throw the rip current victim something that floats.
- Never enter the water without a flotation device.

WHEN YOU GET TO THE BEACH...

- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard-protected beach. Ask a lifeguard about the conditions before entering the water.
- Obey all instructions/orders from lifeguards and posted signs. They are there for your wellbeing.
- Never swim alone.
- Stay at least 100 feet (30 meters) away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist alongside these structures.