

Where Is It Safe to Swim?



Swimming in lakes, rivers and oceans can be safe and fun at a designated swimming area that is protected by lifeguards. However, if these elements are not in place, always assume that any natural body of water is too dangerous for swimming.

Understand the risks.

- Weather conditions can make the natural water environment more dangerous. Always check the weather before heading out to any aquatic environment—and stay away if inclement weather is expected.
- Even at a designated swim area, water conditions can change. Storms, heavy rains and flooding can change the water depth and cause strong currents. New unseen obstacles may become hazards.
- Ocean waves and currents are always a safety concern. Even at guarded beaches, wave activity can be dangerous. Do not swim at unguarded ocean beaches or in areas not designated for swimming.
- More than 100 people die annually due to rip currents on our nation's beaches.* These strong currents can form on any shoreline where waves break and can carry a person away from shore, so anyone near a beach must be careful.
- It is difficult to estimate water depth and to see hidden objects under water in the natural environment. Head, neck and back injuries can occur from hitting the bottom or striking an object in the water.

Practice water safety.

- Swim with a buddy in a designated area that is supervised by lifeguards. Recheck the water and weather conditions on arrival and during your stay.
- Heed the warnings and special instructions of lifeguards or other authorities as well as flags or signs.
- Know before you go—don't swim if you don't know if it's safe. Wear a life jacket if you are unfamiliar with the area.
- Watch out for the "dangerous too's": too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun and too much strenuous activity.
- Walk carefully into open waters; do not dive.
- Make specific rules about how children are to behave near bodies of water in the community—or even your own backyard!

Know how to respond to an aquatic emergency.

- Know where the lifeguards are.
- Know how and when to call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.
- Enroll in Red Cross water safety, first aid and CPR courses to learn what to do.
- Get specialized training for the environment in which you will be swimming. For example, if swimming at a surf beach, check with the lifeguards to learn about and how to handle the conditions of the area.

**Source: United States Lifesaving Association*

For more information or to enroll in Swimming and Water Safety courses, contact your local Red Cross chapter.

