

# Rip Currents



What They Are • The Dangers • How to Escape

**Before you leave for the beach, NOAA encourages you to check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach conditions. Many offices issue a Surf Zone Forecast.**

## Q How can I identify a rip current?

Signs that a rip current is present are very subtle and difficult for the average beachgoer to identify. Look for differences in the water color, water motion, incoming wave shape or breaking point compared to adjacent conditions. Look for any of these clues:

- Channel of churning, choppy water
- Area having a notable difference in water color
- Line of foam, seaweed, or debris moving steadily seaward
- Break in the incoming wave pattern
- One, all or none the clues may be visible.

## Q How can people avoid rip current problems?

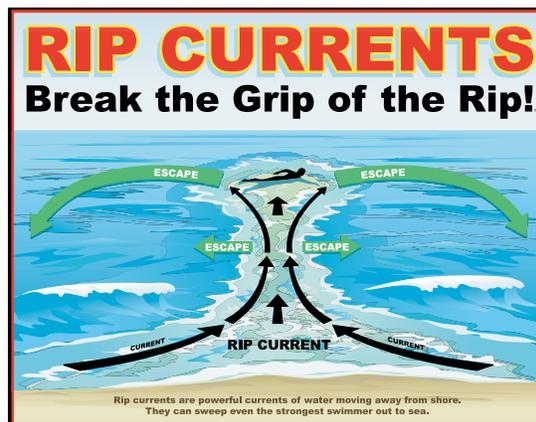
Avoid rip current problem by:

- Learn to swim
- If you'll be in surf, learn to swim in surf. It's not the same as a pool or lake.
- Never swim alone.
- Swim near a lifeguard.
- Look for posted signs and warning flags, which may indicate higher than usual hazards.
- Check with lifeguards before swimming.
- Obey all instructions provided by lifeguards.
- Be cautious. Always assume rip currents are present even if you don't see them.
- If in doubt, don't go out!

## Q What can people do if caught in a rip current?

If caught in a rip current:

- Try to remain calm to conserve energy.
- Don't fight the current.
- Think of it like a treadmill you can't turn off. You want to step to the side of it.
- Swim across the current in a direction following the shoreline.
- When out of the current, swim and angle away from the current and towards shore.



- If you can't escape this, try to float, or calmly tread water. Rip current strength eventually subsides offshore. When it does, swim toward shore.
- If at any time you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.

## Q How can people assist others who are caught in a rip current?

You can help someone caught in a rip current by:

- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard.
- If no lifeguard is available, have someone call 9-1-1.
- Throw the rip current victim something that floats – a lifejacket, a cooler, a ball.
- Yell instructions on how to escape.
- Many have died trying to help others. Don't become a victim while trying to help someone else!
- Before you leave for the beach, check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach conditions. Many offices issue a Surf Zone Forecast.
- When you arrive at the beach, ask on-duty lifeguards about rip currents and any other hazards that may be present.

**More information about rip currents can be found at the following sites:**

<http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov>    <http://www.usla.org/ripcurrents>

<http://www.weather.gov/nwr/>

