

ROOKIE LIFEGUARD RLSS UK

On the beach

Swimming in the sea can be fun but it does have dangers. As far as possible, make sure that the beach you choose has lifeguards and is suitable for swimming.

Actions

- keep clear of surfboards, boats and natural hazards
- get out of the water as soon as you feel cold or conditions become dangerous
- get advice about swimming conditions
- find out the location of the nearest telephone and first aid point
- swim along the shore and not away from it
- be aware of others in the water
- signal for help if you get into difficulties
- keep inflatable dinghies on a fixed line
- tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back
- go with a friend
- stay sober, avoid alcohol
- stay away from boats or surfing areas marked by black and white flags
- stay within the swimming area
- swim diagonally across a rip current to get to safety
- obey the lifeguard's instructions

Dangers

- be aware that during a rising tide – it's easy to get stranded on sand banks or rocks
- be aware that during a falling tide – it's easy to be pulled out to sea
- rip tides can pull you out to sea
- powerful waves can knock you over
- weeds and rocks can make you slip, trip or get trapped
- be aware of strong winds – offshore winds are particularly dangerous for inflatables
- remember that cold water quickly affects the ability to swim



Other dangers around the beach include

- cliffs or rocks may be crumbly, steep or slippery
- 'tomb-stoning' - jumping from rocks into the sea is very dangerous as the water can be shallow or there are hidden objects
- other beach activities like kite surfing
- caves - be aware of the incoming tide, which could cut you off from land
- mud flats and quick sand - it is very easy for people to get stuck in this especially when wet
- manmade structures - pier supports, groynes and other structures cause strong currents around them and are often hidden when the tide is in
- seawalls - can trap people on the beach when there are fast incoming tides
- crowded beaches often mean it is easy to lose younger children and they could slip away into the sea unnoticed

How many dangers can you spot in the picture?

Know your flags

There are two groups of flags, those with solid colours which indicate the wind, weather and water conditions, and those with two colours which indicate the areas designated for specific activities and those patrolled by a lifeguard.

Red flag – Danger

This means rough water, powerful waves, heavy surf and other dangers or even a change in weather conditions from calm to those which are life-threatening and dangerous.



Black / white quartered flag

Means that the area usually between two flags is only for watersports and is not safe for swimmers.



Red over yellow flag

Means that an area, usually between two flags, is patrolled or observed by a lifeguard and is likely to be the safest area for swimming only. Swimmers should still be aware of dangers.



Orange wind sock

Shows what direction the wind is blowing



Signs

Look for signs when you are going to the beach. They will tell you about the beach itself, if there are any lifeguards, when they operate, as well as any dangers present



Cold Water has extra dangers

Open water is usually colder than water in a swimming pool. Water in reservoirs, lakes and rivers can be very deep and doesn't warm up – even during hot weather. Although the water may be warm at the edge and in the shallows, the temperature often drops suddenly. Water cools you much faster than air does. When you are cold, you lose strength, you slow down and you can't swim as far. Many people drown because they don't realise that cold water reduces their physical ability.

- A person's normal temperature is roughly 37°C. In cold water a person's temperature will quickly drop
- At 35°C the swimmer will find it difficult to breathe and may gasp for breath
- Below 35°C the swimmer will start to shiver and if the core temperature drops further they may develop hypothermia
- If they stay in the water they may become unconscious and drown
- In windy conditions wind chill can speed up the cooling process

Alcohol

It is very dangerous to go swimming after drinking alcohol or taking other recreational drugs. Alcohol can make you feel as if you are invincible. You lose heat more quickly, can't swim as well and soon become very cold. Every year people drown because they have mixed alcohol and swimming.