

Water Safety: Frequently asked questions

Beaches

Where is the safest place to swim at beaches?

Swim at patrolled beaches. This means red and yellow flags will be on the beach and the area will be watched by lifeguards or lifesavers.

If you have a question when at a patrolled beach, do not hesitate to ask the life-saver/lifeguard. They are trained to help you. If necessary, bring someone with you who speaks English.

What is a rip?

Currents in the sea can sometimes carry you away from the shore. These are called rips and you should keep well away. If you notice a section of water that is running out to sea, looks rippled and is a sandy colour with cleaner water on either side, this may be a rip. The waves may also be larger and breaking further out to sea on both sides of the rip.

Where do rips occur?

Rips occur along almost all stretches of beach and in and around rocks, break-walls or any permanent fixture in the ocean. The larger the waves, the stronger and larger the rips. Most seaward-running rips normally end not far beyond the level of the breaking waves. Side currents can cause people to be washed off safe swimming areas where waves break on sandbars.

What do I do if I get caught in a rip?

Staying calm is essential. Don't try to swim directly against the rip and if you are a strong swimmer try to swim at an angle across the rip. At patrolled beaches if you need help, raise your arm straight up in the air, and call out for help. It is important just to float as this will save your energy until help arrives.

Who patrols beaches?

Volunteer lifesavers and professional lifeguards patrol beaches. Lifesavers/lifeguards patrol beaches mainly on weekends and public holiday periods. Some beaches are patrolled by lifeguards all year round.

What equipment do lifeguards use?

Lifeguards/lifesavers are trained in the use of a range of first aid and rescue equipment.

What signs are used at beaches?

Australian standard signs are used at beaches to provide information, warn people of hazards and to regulate particular activity. If you aren't sure of what particular signs mean, then ask the lifeguard or lifesaver on duty.

How do I become a lifesaver?

Anyone from the age of seven can join a surf lifesaving club and learn the necessary skills to become an active surf lifesaver. If you wish to join, all you need to do is contact your nearest Surf Life Saving Club. In the summer months this can be done on a Saturday or Sunday, or by introducing yourself to the patrol. You can contact Surf Life Saving NSW during working hours on 02 9984 7188 (English only) or email experts@surflifesaving.com.au for more information.

Backyard Swimming Pools

Do I have to have a pool fence?

This depends on when your pool was built. If your pool was built *before* 1 August 1990 then you do not have to have a swimming pool fence as such, but the pool **MUST** be isolated from access from the street or from adjoining properties. The pool does not have to be separated from any residential building on the land provided the access to the pool from the building is restricted at all times. If your pool was built *after* 1 August 1990, then you are required to have a child resistant pool fence that complies with Australian Standard 1926-1986 'Fences and Gates for Swimming Pools'. You should contact your council for further information on these standards.

What are my responsibilities if I am a tenant in a property on which there is a swimming pool?

Under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987, it is usually the landlord's responsibility to provide and maintain the premises in a reasonable state of repair, however the tenant is not to intentionally or negligently damage the premises. The tenant must notify the landlord of any damage. The landlord is responsible for meeting any pool fencing requirements.

What is my local council's role in relation to swimming pool fencing?

Your local council is responsible for the enforcement of the Swimming Pools Act 1992 and can advise on the standards required. Councils can grant exemptions from the requirements of the Act in certain circumstances. There is a right of appeal against a refusal to grant an exemption. For further information, contact your local council.

I have a backyard swimming pool. What are some of the safety issues I need to consider?

Owning and operating a home pool or spa is in some respects no different from running a public pool. You are still aiming to provide a safe, clean environment for your family and friends. The major issue for you as a pool owner is children – your own, your friends and your neighbours. If you own a pool you should consider the following safety issues:

- Do you have a regular maintenance plan for your pool pumps and filters?
- Do you know what to do if there is a lack of water clarity or chemical irregularities in your pool?
- Do you know what you to do in the case of near drowning, spinal injury, or chemical spill?

- Do you have any rescue equipment such as rescue poles or rescue tubes?
- Is the rescue equipment in easy reach and in good order?
- Do you keep electrical equipment away from the pool?

What are some of the things I need to consider when dealing with pool chemicals?

In order to maintain your pool at the standard of cleanliness to prevent infections and disease you will need to sanitise the water. In most home pools this is done using a pump, a series of filters and chemical treatment of the water. There are a number of simple safety issues you should remember when using and handling chemicals, these include:

If your pool fails a water test at any stage DO NOT allow anyone to swim in it until it is corrected.

- Store pool chemicals in a dry, cool location away from other chemicals;
- Wear gloves and eyewear when handling pool chemicals;
- Talk with your local pool shop on appropriate water quality for swimming;
- Keep chemicals away from children; and
- Check water quality regularly.

Young Children and Water Safety

Do I need to supervise my child in the pool constantly?

Yes. Tragically, many drownings happen in the few seconds that parents are distracted. Supervision means your child is being continually watched by you or an appropriate adult.

You should watch all the time, not just glance every now and then whilst you read a book or relax. Regardless of what you are doing, always keep watch when children are in, on or around water. Take your child with you whenever you leave the swimming pool or bathtub. Never under any circumstances leave them alone!

Make a checklist:

- Is your child being supervised?
- Have you emptied the bathtub?
- Is the lid on the nappy bucket?
- Can your child gain access to the pool or spa?
- Have you checked for other water dangers such as open drains, garden ponds, creeks or dams?

Why do I need to learn resuscitation?

A child's life may be saved if the parents or carers have the proper knowledge and skills to rescue and resuscitate quickly and confidently.

There are a number of resuscitation courses run by recognised providers. The Royal Life Saving Society conducts resuscitation courses and also sells resuscitation posters. These posters show the way to resuscitate someone and should be

openly displayed in a prominent position by your pool. For course details or resuscitation posters contact the Society on 02 9879 4699 (English only).

What is the right age for my child to begin water familiarisation courses?

It is recommended that young children can begin water familiarisation programs from 6 months of age. The water temperature should be at least 30 degrees with air temperature ideally higher (this means in an indoor pool).

Should my child use flotation aides?

Your child should not become dependent on a flotation aide. Children should be able to master the water environment on their own. Flotation aides are no substitute for constant supervision when infants and children are in the water.

Inland waterways - Farms

Who drowns on Australian farms?

Whilst people of all ages drown on Australian farms, generally it is children (aged less than 15 years of age). The highest risk category are children aged less than 5 years of age.

Where on farms do people drown?

Drowning deaths on farms most commonly occur in dams, water reservoirs and irrigation channels, as well as in creeks and rivers. There have also been cases recorded where young children have drowned in troughs, where animals come to drink, uncovered sewerage and ponds, wells, and an uncovered holes in the ground after a period of rain.

How can I prevent people from drowning on my farm?

A high number of toddler drownings occur in lakes, rivers and dams. You can restrict your child's access to these dangers by creating a 'Child Safe Area' in and around your home. Remember dams on farms are dangerous.

The best way to reduce the risk of drowning on a farm is to isolate children from water sources. The most effective method of achieving this is through parental supervision/childcare and the creation of safe play areas that isolate the child from hazards. Wherever there is water such as in tanks, troughs and sewerage it should be covered and isolated. Open bodies of water such as dams can be fenced off. Older children should take swimming lessons and have rules set at home that do not allow them to go near water hazards.

All pools on the farm should be fenced according to the pool fencing standards.

Boating

When and why should I check the weather conditions before I go out boating?

A thorough check of weather conditions is vital every time you go boating. It is important to appreciate how the conditions may change throughout the day. A fore-

cast change in weather for example may result in relatively calm conditions in the morning turning into potentially dangerous conditions in the afternoon. So it is better not to drink alcohol on boats.

Make sure your vessel is appropriate for the conditions and that you have the necessary experience to handle the forecast conditions. Remember if in doubt, don't go out.

I've been boating for years and can swim OK, do I still need to wear a life jacket?

Life jackets are an important safety item on any boat and there should be one on board for each person. It is recommended that children and poor swimmers wear one at all times on a boat.

Make sure that your life jacket is in good condition, accessible and ready for use. Your equipment was designed to help save lives.

Is it OK to drink alcohol when out on the water in a boat?

The combination of wind waves and weather can multiply the effects of alcohol and collectively are known as 'boater fatigue'. Persons with 'boater fatigue' are at a greater risk of drowning if they fall into the water and that goes equally for skipper, crew or passenger.

The blood alcohol limits are the same on the water as on our roads. A person in charge of a vessel must keep under the 0.05 blood alcohol limit and for commercial vessel operators and persons under the age of 18 years of age, the lower blood alcohol limit of 0.02 applies.

Rock fishing

Is rock fishing safe?

Every year people are killed when rock fishing in NSW. If you want to rockfish, learn how to minimise the risks.

How can I reduce the risks of rock fishing?

The three main ways to reduce the risks of rock fishing are:

1. check and understand the weather conditions and tides before you leave home;
2. never fish alone; and
3. wear the right fishing gear.

What is the best type of gear to wear when rock fishing?

Most importantly, wear non-slip shoes that stop you from slipping off the rocks into the water.

Wear lightweight clothing and a flotation jacket, so that if you're swept off rocks, you are buoyant and your clothes don't drag you down. Also, wear head protection. Evidence suggests that many people who have drowned received some sort of head injury.

How do I know if a spot is safe for rock fishing?

No place is perfectly safe for rock fishing. To minimise risks, fish only with others in places where experienced anglers go. Spend at least half an hour watching the wind and wave action before deciding whether a place is suitable. Think - what will your fishing spot be like in a few hours' time with different tides and weather?

Do I need a fishing licence when rock fishing?

If you're over 18 years of age and not a pensioner, you need a licence to fish in NSW. This includes rock fishing and collecting bait. You can buy your licence from hundreds of local agents (bait and tackle shops, caravan parks, general stores and service stations); on the internet at www.fisheries.nsw.gov.au or by phoning 1300 369 365 (English only). Cost is \$25 per year or less for shorter periods.

I enjoy collecting abalone, oysters or other molluscs off the rocks. Is this as dangerous as rock fishing?

Whenever you're on coastal rocks where waves can sweep you into the water, you should follow the same practical guidelines to keep safe – know and understand the weather conditions and tides, don't go alone, and wear the right clothing, especially non-slip shoes. And remember you need a fishing licence when collecting any marine creatures, even by hand.