

10 Rules of Safety

Take the Plunge, Learn to Swim!



- 1. Swim Near A Lifeguard:** USLA statistics over a ten year period show that the chance of drowning at a beach without lifeguard protection is almost five times as great as drowning at a beach with lifeguards. USLA has calculated the chance that a person will drown while attending a beach protected by USLA affiliated lifeguards at 1 in 18 million (.0000055%).
- 2. Learn To Swim:** Learning to swim is the best defense against drowning. Teach children to swim at an early age. Children who are not taught when they are very young tend to avoid swim instruction as they age, probably due to embarrassment. Swimming instruction is a crucial step to protecting children from injury or death.
- 3. Never Swim Alone:** Many drownings involve single swimmers. When you swim with a buddy, if one of you has a problem, the other may be able to help, including signaling for assistance from others. At least have someone onshore watching you.
- 4. Don't Fight the Current:** USLA has found that some 80% of rescues by USLA affiliated lifeguards at ocean beaches are caused by rip currents. These currents are formed by surf and gravity, because once surf pushes water up the slope of the beach, gravity pulls it back. This can create concentrated rivers of water moving offshore. Some people mistakenly call this an undertow, but there is no undercurrent, just an offshore current. If you are caught in a rip current, don't fight it by trying to swim directly to shore. Instead, swim parallel to shore until you feel the current relax, then swim to shore. Most rip currents are narrow and a short swim parallel to shore will bring you to safety.
- 5. Swim Sober:** Alcohol is a major factor in drowning. Alcohol can reduce body temperature and impair swimming ability. Perhaps more importantly, both alcohol and drugs impair good judgment, which may cause people to take risks they would not otherwise take.
- 6. Leash Your Board:** Surfboards and bodyboards should be used only with a leash. Leashes are usually attached to the board and the ankle or wrist. They are available in most shops where surfboards and bodyboards are sold or rented. With a leash, the user will not become separated from the floatation device. One additional consideration is a breakaway leash. A few drownings have been attributed to leashes becoming entangled in underwater obstructions. A breakaway leash avoids this problem.
- 7. Don't Float Where You Can't Swim:** Nonswimmers often use floatation devices, like inflatable rafts, to go offshore. If they fall off, they can quickly drown. No one should use a floatation device unless they are able to swim. Use of a leash is not enough because a non-swimmer may panic and be unable to swim back to the floatation device, even with a leash. The only exception is a person wearing a Coast Guard approved life jacket.
- 8. Life Jackets = Boating Safety:** Some 80% of fatalities associated with boating accidents are from drowning. Most involve people who never expected to end up in the water, but fell overboard or ended up in the water when the boat sank. Children are particularly susceptible to this problem and in many states, children are required to be in lifejackets whenever they are aboard boats.
- 9. Don't Dive Headfirst, Protect Your Neck:** Serious, lifelong injuries, including paraplegia, occur every year due to diving headfirst into unknown water and striking the bottom. Bodysurfing can result in a serious neck injury when the swimmer's neck strikes the bottom. Check for depth and obstructions before diving, then go in feet first the first time; and use caution while bodysurfing, always extending a hand ahead of you.
- 10. At Home, You're the Lifeguard:** Drowning is the leading cause of accidental death in many states for children age one and two. A major reason for this is home pools, which can be death traps for toddlers. Many of these deaths occur in the few moments it takes a parent to answer a telephone or doorbell. NEVER leave a child alone anywhere near a pool. Make sure it is completely fenced, that the fence is locked, and that there is no access from the home to the pool. Don't let your child or a neighbor's child get into the pool when you're not there.