

Injuries from ocean waves more common than thought

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Shallow surf can pose real risks, Delaware study finds.

(HealthDay)—A study out of Delaware suggests that injuries to beachgoers caused by ocean waves are more common and severe than previously suspected, and people need to be aware of the ocean's power—even in shallow water.

To keep safe, it's important to swim at beaches with lifeguards, ask them about surf conditions and never turn your back to the waves, one study author suggested.

Over the past three summers, more than 1,100 ocean-wave-related injuries that required emergency room treatment were reported among Delaware beachgoers. The injuries ranged from sprains and strains to [broken bones](#), blunt organ trauma and neck fractures. There were three deaths.

The most common types of injuries were broken collarbones, dislocated and separated shoulders, [neck pain](#), and ankle and knee sprains.

The injuries occurred in an area called the surf zone, where many people play in the waves. This is the stretch of shoreline between the water's edge and where the waves break. In this area, waves can hit people and slam them into the sand. Most of the injuries in this study occurred in less than two feet of water.

"Historically, the magnitude of these injuries is largely underreported," study co-leader Paul Cowan, chief of [emergency medicine](#) at the Beebe Medical Center in Lewes, said in a University of Delaware news release. "This is the first study that documents and tracks the number of significant injuries occurring in the surf zone."

Lifeguards at three popular Delaware beach communities—Bethany, Dewey and Rehoboth—and several state park beaches provided researchers with information on beach conditions.

Although injuries to the neck and spinal cord accounted for less than 5 percent of all cases, these patients suffered some of the most complex and life-altering injuries, Cowan said.

Overall, the findings seemed to indicate "that a lot of these folks simply don't understand the power of the ocean, or they don't know how to swim in [ocean waves](#) and currents," study co-leader Wendy Carey, of the Delaware Sea Grant College Program, said in the news release.

More information: The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration outlines [seven dangers at the beach](#).

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