

Summer beach time means water safety

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Expert offers tips for dealing with rip currents and other risks.

(HealthDay)—The millions of Americans who will flock to beaches this summer need to keep safety in mind as they frolic in the sand and surf, an expert advises.

"Any [beach](#) can be dangerous, and you need to be careful at all times, especially if children are with you," Amie Hufton, an instructional assistant professor in [physical education](#) at Texas A&M University at Galveston, said in a university news release.

"Swimmers always need to be careful. One of the biggest dangers they face is a rip current. A rip current is created when the backrushing of water from the beach is channeled in a direction away from the shore. Some of these can be very strong, strong enough to pull you far away from the beach," explained Hufton, an open-water lifeguard.

Eighty percent of rescues by ocean lifeguards involve people caught in

rip currents, according to the U.S. Lifesaving Association.

"If you feel a rip current or think you might be in one, never swim against it. Try to stay calm and swim perpendicular to the current, which usually means parallel to the shore," Hufton said.

Alcohol is another potential danger at beaches. About half of all drowning victims over age 13 had high blood-alcohol levels, according to the Texas A&M [expert](#).

And, if you're not a strong swimmer, don't depend on cheap, plastic rafts to keep you afloat, Hufton cautioned. Wear a Coast Guard-approved lifejacket instead.

Another important tip is to always swim with other people.

"It's never wise to swim alone, and if possible, use a buddy system to watch over each other in the water," Hufton said.

It's also a good idea to swim near a lifeguard.

"Always make sure you can see a lifeguard when you are in the water, and before you get in the water, it's not a bad idea to go up and ask one how conditions are that day. They can give you some very good information. Most drownings occur on beaches where there is no lifeguard present," Hufton said.

It's also crucial to keep a close eye on children.

"Kids can easily wander off by themselves at the beach. If they get lost, they often follow the path of least resistance, which means they usually walk away from the sun, and often with the wind. Finding them often involves tracing a route from where they were last seen," Hufton said.

Also, don't let children swim near permanent structures because there is a much higher chance of a rip current there," she added.

More information: Safe Kids Worldwide has more about [water safety](#)

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