



Armenta Learning Academy

Beach Safety Tips

Written By Julie M. Armenta, M.A.
Educational & Family Specialist

Preventing surf-related neck and spinal cord injuries is everyone's responsibility. The following beach safety tips will help keep you safe this summer.

- ✎ Learn to swim. If you can't swim an overhead stroke for at least 15 minutes, you should not be in the ocean.
- ✎ Never swim alone, and swim near a lifeguard whenever possible.
- ✎ Check with a lifeguard to find out where shallow and deepwater areas are located. Do not assume that the ocean floor has an even bottom. The sandy ocean floor is constantly changing with the currents, creating both deep holes and shallow sandbars within minutes. Look for flags and signs for updates of no swimming zones, high tide, low tide, and water quality. Red flags mean don't swim, yellow ones mean use extreme caution, and green ones mean be careful but enjoy the calmer waves.
- ✎ Be aware of polluted waters that can be detrimental to your health by causing illness, or bacteria in the water, which could possibly lead to death. Some beaches are more hazardous than others. Daily to weekly listings of hazardous beaches can usually be found in the local section of your daily newspaper, or you can check online. Huntington Beach, Doheny Beach, and parts of Newport Beach are frequently contaminated. Remember to check those water quality signs before swimming.

Armenta Learning Academy

- ☞ Don't run from the beach into the water and dive head first into the waves. Sandbars that can't be seen from the surface may be present and/or the water may be too shallow.
- ☞ Don't jump or dive into the water from a pier or rock jetty where water appears much deeper than it really is. What looks like 10 to 20 feet of water may only be two to three feet deep. Diving in could be fatal.
- ☞ If you're body surfing or boogie boarding, always keep your arms out in front of you to protect your head and neck. Always wear fins and a board leash.
- ☞ Stay out of the "surf zone" where the waves break. Waves are at their most forceful here, and even small waves can lift you up and throw you into the sand. Avoid this by not trying to catch a wave too late or by ducking under the wave.
- ☞ If you are pulled out to sea by a rip current, don't panic. A rip current will pull you away from the shore, but will not pull you under. Just swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the rip, then swim in to shore. (That is why bullet point number one is extremely important.)
- ☞ If you are in trouble, call or wave for help. Try to always have someone in your family or group of friends watch those who are swimming.
- ☞ Never drink or use drugs at the beach. It clouds your ability to make wise decisions, and that could be fatal! Be sure to drink lots of water to avoid dehydration and make wise decisions about staying in the heat for too long. Signs of dehydration are headaches, dizziness or lightheadedness, and feeling tired.

Adapted from the July 11th, 2002 issue of OC Metro with additions and revisions by Julie M. Armenta, M.A.

