

**Utmost care should be taken when swimming in the ocean at South African beaches. There are a number of potential hazards that visitors to South African beaches should be cognisant of, such as rip currents, hidden rocks, unexpectedly high waves, bluebottles, sharks or jellyfish. These risks can be located by trained beach lifeguards. Therefore it is strongly advised to only swim at beaches where lifeguards are on duty, and to avoid desolate and unguarded beaches.**

### **Shark attacks**

Shark attacks are rare, but they do happen, so take care not to swim at dawn or dusk when attacks are more likely, or in dirty water caused by river flooding, or during the annual sardine run.

A black flag indicates that a beach is closed due to a shark sighting, while no-swimming beacons advise no swimming on the day, possibly due to dirty water, dangerous currents or even the annual sardine run, which attracts sharks as the predators feed on the bounty created by millions of migrating fish.

### **Rip currents**

(Ref. : <https://www.ilsf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/LPS-18-Rip-Currents-Position-Statement-200303.pdf>)

Rip currents are strong, narrow and seaward flowing surface currents that occur at any beach that experiences waves breaking across a wide surf zone. Rip currents are not to be confused with undertows.

There are different types of rip currents that exhibit complex flow behavior. Therefore, no single piece of rip current safety advice related to rip escape actions will suit all situations. Rip currents are often difficult to recognize by people who have not been trained in how to spot a rip current.

Seven common signs that rip currents may exist are : a narrow band of deeper, darker coloured water extending seaward ; a narrow offshore band extending offshore with fewer breaking waves ; a disturbed and rippled appearance, surrounded by smoother water ; debris floating seaward ; foamy, turbulent or discoloured sandy water extending beyond the surf break ; the presence of a natural or manmade boundary such as a pier, groyne or break wall.

Rip currents represent the major cause of rescues and fatalities at surf beaches around the world, due to people swimming against the current and incurring energy loss which is exacerbated by panic. They are then unable to stay afloat long enough to return to shallower water or to be rescued.

### **The rip current safety advice**

Given that each rip current works in a unique way and each person will respond differently, the best way to minimize the hazard of rip currents, is to **avoid rip currents** by swimming near a lifeguard at a supervised location.

**If in doubt, don't go out.**

**If avoidance fails and you get caught in a rip current :**

- Don't panic, float, conserve your energy and consider your options.
- Do not swim directly back to the beach against the rip current flow.
- Stay calm and seek help, particularly if you are close to a supervised location.
- Float, go with the rip current flow and see if you are returned to shallower water.
- Then the best active response is to swim sideways out of the rip current, towards the breaking waves. If the rip current is flowing straight offshore, this will be in a direction parallel to the beach.
- Use the waves to help get you back to the beach.

**In case of emergency call 112 from your cell phone.**