



Lifeboats

RESPECT
THE WATER



ON THE COAST

Your guide to staying safe on
the beach and in the water

Photo: RNLI/Nathan Williams



The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

ON THE COAST UNDERSTANDING FLAGS

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of people visit the seaside every year to swim, sunbathe, explore rockpools, build sandcastles and enjoy watersports. These activities are great fun and form part of a healthy lifestyle but we want you to think about your safety too.

One of the best ways of staying safe – and increasing your chances of being rescued – is to choose a lifeguarded beach. You can find your nearest lifeguarded beach at [RNLI.org/beaches](https://www.rnli.org/beaches).

Every year our lifeguards respond to around 1,500 surfing related incidents. So, if you're thinking of starting any watersport, we recommend you get advice from an accredited training centre or school first.

This guide is full of useful tips to help you understand the beach environment and keep you safe in and around the water. You will also find sports-specific safety tips and recommended equipment, as well as contacts for popular surf sports governing bodies.

We hope it makes a good starting point to a great time at the seaside this summer.

Enjoy!

RNLI Team

In this guide you will see two types of warning symbol:



This is a hazard to watch out for – take care!



This is a prohibition sign – don't do it!

Around the coastline you will see these safety flags:

RED AND YELLOW FLAGS

Lifeguarded area. Safest area to swim, bodyboard and use inflatables.

BLACK AND WHITE CHEQUERED FLAGS

For surfboards, stand up paddle boards, kayaks, and other non-powered craft. Launch and recovery area for kitesurfers and windsurfers. Never swim or bodyboard here.

RED FLAG

Danger! Never go in the water under any circumstances when the red flag is flying.

ORANGE WINDSOCK

Indicates offshore or strong winds conditions. Never use inflatables when the windsock is flying.



Learners should not kitesurf, windsurf or use stand up paddle boards when the wind is blowing offshore.



WHICH BEACH?

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE BEACH OR ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SOMEWHERE NEW? HOW DO YOU CHOOSE? MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER THE:

- ease of transport and parking
- toilets
- sand or stones
- cleanliness
- access to fresh water and showers
- refreshment facilities
- attractions nearby.

The seaside isn't most people's usual environment so it's easy to miss some of its hazards. Try to plan for the following points before you set out – and don't forget to read the safety signs.

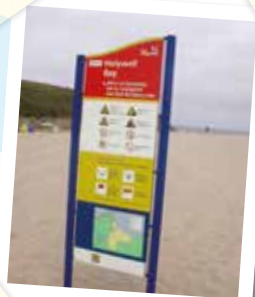


Photo: SLSA

HAZARDS ON THE BEACH

- high and low tides – will the beach be there at high tide?
- sharp objects or litter hidden in the sand
- slippery rocks or big drops from cliffs and harbour walls
- unstable cliffs – stay away from cliffs at all times.

AND IN THE WATER

- rip currents or dumping waves – they could drag you out of your depth
- jellyfish and weeverfish, which can sting
- offshore winds – don't get blown out to sea
- man made structures like piers and groynes
- other water users – swimmers don't mix well with powerboats!

UNDERSTANDING RIPS



RIPS ARE STRONG CURRENTS THAT CAN QUICKLY TAKE YOU FROM THE SHALLOWS OUT OF YOUR DEPTH

- stay calm – don't panic
- if you can stand, wade don't swim
- keep hold of your board or inflatable to help you float
- raise your hand and shout for help
- never try to swim directly against the rip or you'll get exhausted
- swim parallel to the beach until free of the rip, then use the waves to help you get back to shore
- if you see anyone else in trouble, call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard.

RIP CURRENT SHOWN WITH COLOURED DYE



Photo: RNLI



WHAT TO DO IF CAUGHT IN A RIP

WAVES



Waves are formed by the wind blowing across the surface of the sea. How steeply a beach shelves will affect the size and type of wave.

Spilling waves are ideal for beginner board riders as they break consistently. Start off in the shallow white water before progressing to deeper water and unbroken waves.



Photo: RNLI/Greg Spray

Dumping waves or heavy shore break should be avoided. These waves break quickly with a lot of force making them dangerous for beginners.



TIDES



A beach can seem like a vast playground but the tide can come in surprisingly quickly. Many lifeboat and lifeguard rescues are to people getting cut off by the rising water. To prevent this happening to you, get local tidal information from the internet, the harbour master, tourist information centre or some seaside retail outlets. Always keep a look out for the tide's direction while on the beach.

TOMBSTONING



Jumping from heights into water is dangerous because:

- water depth alters with the tide – it might be shallower than you think
- submerged objects like rocks may not be visible
- it can be really cold and the shock makes it difficult to swim
- there can be strong currents that might sweep you away.

Many people have been seriously hurt or even killed due to tombstoning. Our advice is not to do it at all.

HEALTH AND FITNESS

PREPARATION

Before you get in the water it's important to consider your personal fitness as the sea can be a very demanding environment. Swimming is one of the best year-round activities to help prepare your body so we'd recommend you get in the pool and start practising now!



FOOD

While you'll probably take cold food with you or buy refreshments on site, you may fancy cooking instead. Some beaches have clearly marked barbeque areas set aside for this. If you are unsure whether you can light a barbeque where you are, then it's best that you don't. Remember that a disposable barbeque stays very hot for a long time, so don't bury it for someone else to burn their feet on. The Marine Conservation Society reports that litter levels have nearly doubled in 18 years. Please help to do something about it and always dispose of your rubbish in the bin or take it home so the beach remains clean and the wildlife doesn't get injured. If you want to do something about the problem, join in with a beach clean at mcsuk.org.

DRINKS



Fluid is vital. Cooler weather can mean a flask of tea or soup, but make sure there is plenty of water for everyone. The wind and sun can easily dehydrate you even when it isn't very hot, especially if you're wearing a wetsuit. Alcohol is a poor idea at the beach. It affects judgement, leading to greater risk-taking behaviour. It's not advisable to enter the water when you've been drinking, especially in the evening. Alcohol also contributes to dehydration, increasing the danger of heat stroke. Be moderate or, better still, leave this kind of partying until after you've left the beach.

FAMILY FUN

BE SUN SMART



The RNLI has teamed up with the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) to help keep our beaches safe and clean for people and wildlife. MCS recommends you visit goodbeachguide.co.uk to discover Britain's best and cleanest beaches.

When you've arrived at your chosen beach, exploring the seashore is fantastic fun for all the family. You can find a new world of wildlife in shallow pools among boulders and sands.

While most creatures are harmless, weeverfish, jellyfish and anemones are common finds that will cause a painful injury, so please remember to look and not touch.

To keep yourself and beach wildlife safe, MCS says:

- leave animals where you find them
- carefully lift and replace any rocks you may have removed – there are animals beneath that need them for shelter
- leave attached seaweed in place – there is plenty lying loose on the shoreline
- do not trample through the rock pools
- play away from cliffs.



MISSING CHILDREN

Children are safest when supervised. As soon as you get to the beach, agree a meeting point in case of separation. If the beach runs a children's safety scheme, using wristbands or tickets, take part. They're free and they work.

If your child does go missing:

- calmly check your surroundings first, ensuring other children remain monitored
- contact a lifeguard, beach warden, seafront officer or police and keep them informed
- let all searchers know once the child is found.



Sunburn can ruin your holiday and increase the risk of skin cancer in later life. According to Skcin, the Karen Clifford Skin Cancer Charity, we experience over half our lifetime's exposure to the sun before we reach the age of 21.

So please, keep safe this summer and follow the six Ss of sun safety:

- Sunscreen – slop on SPF 30+ broad-spectrum waterproof sunscreen every 2 hours
- Sun hat – slap on a broad-brimmed hat that shades your face, neck and ears
- Sunglasses – wear wrap-around sunglasses with UV protection to shield your eyes
- Shoulders – slip on a T-shirt or UV protective suit for children and remember to keep your shoulders covered
- Shade – seek shade, particularly during the hottest time of the day between 11am and 3pm when UV penetration is at its strongest
- Sip plenty of water to stay hydrated

For more information on sun safety, visit skcin.org



TREATING A STING

ALWAYS WEAR PROTECTION!



WEEVERFISH

These are plain-looking fish that sometimes nestle in the sand, in water just a few centimetres deep. A weeverfish will raise a sharp spine on its back in self-defence if trodden on – ouch! Place the affected area in water as hot as you can stand. Test the water first so you don't scald the skin.



JELLYFISH

In the UK most jellyfish stings are mild and can be treated simply:

- Scrape off remaining tentacles; don't rub (avoid more stings)
- Rinse area in sea water
- Fresh water and cool packs may worsen the pain – avoid
- Vinegar does not help with stings from UK jellyfish

Jellyfish are also turtle dinner! Help MCS learn more about these rare visitors by recording jellyfish sightings at mcsuk.org.



ANEMONES

You can find anemones stuck on rocks. These are soft-bodied creatures that can produce a nasty rash if brushed against – though most people won't be affected.



WETSUITS

A wetsuit will keep you warm and comfortable, allowing your body to perform more efficiently.

Wetsuits are generally made from neoprene and are designed to maintain your body's core temperature and protect you from the elements. They work by letting a small amount of water in and holding it next to your body. This then heats up from the natural energy produced during exercise. For this reason it's vital to choose a well-fitted suit to avoid being flushed with cold water. A visit to your local wetsuit shop is really important for getting fitted out correctly for a wetsuit – especially if it is your first suit.

Wetsuit thickness is measured in millimetres of neoprene: the thicker the suit the more insulation. As a general rule in the UK most people use full suits, which means long arms and long legs

- **5:3 = Winter suit** approx Nov–Mar (5mm neoprene core, 3mm limbs)
- **4:3 = Spring suit** approx Apr–Oct (4mm neoprene core, 3mm limbs)
- **3:2 = Summer suit** approx June–Sep (3mm neoprene core, 2mm limbs).



SIGNALLING DEVICE

If you get into difficulty it's tempting to try and swim to safety but you should always stay with your kit as it will keep you afloat and make you easier to find in an emergency. A whistle is a simple and effective method of calling for help when close to shore. When venturing further offshore, carry a suitable means of calling for help (waterproof and fully charged VHF or flares). Don't forget, the international distress signal of hand waving and shouting for help still works!



SURF ETIQUETTE



HELMET AND HOOD

To protect your head, it's always advisable to wear a helmet when learning. Try wearing a neoprene hood if you get cold easily.



BUOYANCY AID

A buoyancy aid is a great confidence builder if you're not comfortable in the water. The buoyancy aid should have a minimum buoyancy of 50 Newtons.



BOOTS AND GLOVES

Boots and gloves are also available to provide additional insulation, protection and grip.



To maximise your enjoyment and keep yourself and others safe when riding waves, it's important to understand surf etiquette. Here are a few basic tips that apply to all board riders catching waves. If you are unsure, ask a lifeguard to explain or contact Surfing GB.



PRIORITY CLOSEST TO THE PEAK



DO NOT SNAKE



PRIORITY FURTHEST OUT



PADDLE WIDE NOT THROUGH PEAK



DO NOT DROP IN



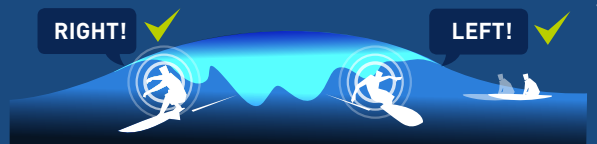
CAUGHT INSIDE STAY IN THE WHITE WATER



DO NOT THROW BOARD



DO NOT DIVE HEAD FIRST



**PRIORITY FIRST TO FEET OR ON THE WAVE
COMMUNICATE CALL LEFT RIGHT**

ENVIRONMENT

Our coastline is home to some of the most important habitats and species and some areas are protected. These range from statutory sites of national or international significance to smaller, non-statutory sites of local importance. Less than 1% of UK waters are fully protected, so we share the responsibility when we visit the coast.

To protect local wildlife, some sites may have restrictions on certain surf sport activities and it is important to check this before you set off. All surf sport activities should be undertaken with care to prevent damaging fragile environments such as dunes and soft reefs, particularly in sensitive areas or where there are high numbers of people using the beach. Birds can be especially sensitive to disturbance so remember to avoid roosting or nesting sites particularly around high tide.

You can find advice, practical guidance and examples of managing a range of pursuits on the ground, on water and in the air on the Best of Both Worlds website at bobw.co.uk. Depending on where you are in the UK or Ireland, take a look at these websites to find out if the beach you're visiting is in a protected site and what habitats and species you might find:

Natural England
naturalengland.org.uk
Countryside Council for Wales
ccw.gov.uk
Northern Ireland Environment Agency
doeni.gov.uk/niea
Scottish Natural Heritage
snh.gov.uk



'Always have a lesson
to get you started and
always surf with a buddy!'

Micah Lester Surf Coach

SURFING AND BODYBOARDING



Surfing GB is the UK's governing body for surfing and bodyboarding. For more information, accredited training centres and recognised schools visit surfinggb.com.

EQUIPMENT

As well as the basic safety equipment, you'll need the following kit to get started:



Board – when selecting a board you need to consider your height, weight and ability. When starting out, a soft foam board is ideal as it is thick and wide, making it easier to float, paddle and catch waves.

Leash – always wear one around the ankle of your back foot so you don't lose your board if you fall off!

Wax – apply this to the deck of your board to give you grip.

Fins – these are vital when bodyboarding to help you catch waves and swim against strong currents.



Photo: BSA

Photo: Tom Venables

STAYING SAFE

ALWAYS:

- wear a bodyboard leash round your wrist so you don't lose your board
- check your equipment for damage before use
- consider other water users – learn surf etiquette and rights of way.

NEVER:

- ditch your board – it will keep you afloat in an emergency and make you easier to find
- go alone
- get on the water in conditions above your capability.



WINDSURFING

RYA

The RYA (Royal Yachting Association) is the UK's governing body for windsurfing, sailing and powerboating. For information on courses and recognised training centres visit rya.org.uk.

EQUIPMENT

As well as the basic personal and safety equipment, you'll need the following kit to get started:



Photo: RYA

Photo: Naish

Photo: RYA

Board – an ideal beginners' board should be wide, durable and buoyant.

Beginner/improver:
170–220 litres and
80–90cm wide.

Harness – enables you to use your body weight, rather than arm strength, to control the sail.

Rig – the 'engine' of a windsurfer, made up of the sail, mast, boom and a mastfoot.

'Windsurfing is an exciting and addictive sport. It's a great way to increase fitness, meet new people and explore amazing places. Regardless of your ability, being safe on the water should always be a priority!'

Amanda Van Santen
RYA Chief Windsurfing Instructor

Photo: RYA



Photo: RYA

Photo: RYA

STAYING SAFE

ALWAYS:

- carry a means of calling for help and keep it within reach
- check your equipment for damage before use
- tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back
- check the weather forecast and tide times
- consider other water users – learn surf etiquette and rights of way
- wear a suitable approved buoyancy aid.

NEVER:

- go alone
- sail in offshore winds without safety boat cover
- get on the water in conditions above your capability
- ditch your board – it will keep you afloat in an emergency and make you easier to find
- leave without a signalling or communication device.



Photo: Dave Leathbrorough

KAYAKING AND CANOEING



British Canoeing is the UK's paddlesports governing body. For more information, accredited training centres or recognised schools visit britishcanoeing.org.uk.

EQUIPMENT

As well as the basic safety equipment, you'll need the following kit to get started:



Boat – beginners should look for an all-round boat that is stable, easy to control, and manoeuvrable. Make sure that it has an adjustable footrest, and preferably a back rest so you can fit it to you. There are many types of kayaks and canoes; ask an expert for advice on what suits your needs.



Paddle – there are many different types of paddle depending on what you are going to be doing; if you are not sure you should definitely get advice on the type and length of paddle.



Spraydeck – the choice to wear a spraydeck depends on both your level of training and the water conditions.

'Canoeing is the most popular and fastest growing watersport in the UK. More than 1.2M people enjoy canoeing every year, so why not give it a try!'

Paul Owen
BCU Chief Executive

Photo: Getty Images

Photo: Lara Tipper



Clothing – paddling in wind, rain or rough seas without adequate clothing can lead to hypothermia so dress accordingly. Wear layered thermal clothing with windproof or waterproof layers, or a wetsuit if you plan to get really wet! Remember to wear a hat on sunny or cold days.'



STAYING SAFE

ALWAYS:

- tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back
- always carry a means of calling for help and keep it within reach
- check your equipment for damage before use
- check the weather forecast and tide times
- learn and practise capsize techniques
- launch and recover between the black and white flags
- consider other water users – learn surf etiquette and rights of way
- wear a suitable approved buoyancy aid and helmet.

NEVER:

- go alone
- ditch your craft – it will keep you afloat in an emergency and make you easier to find
- get on the water in conditions above your capability
- leave without a signalling or communication device
- underestimate the forces of nature and be aware of your environment.



KITESURFING



British Kitesports is the UK's governing body for kitesports. For more information, clubs and recognised training schools visit britishkitesports.org.

EQUIPMENT

As well as the basic safety equipment, you'll need the following kit to get started:



Relaunchable kite – these are inflated with a pump to give the framework buoyancy and structure. The kite is manufactured using marine-grade ripstop and dacron.

Bar and lines – used as the connection to the kite and a means of steering; also incorporated are all the safety devices that enable depowering of the kite almost instantly.

Boards – these come in many sizes; twin tips are most common, which can be ridden in either direction, and surfboards are used where there are waves.

Harness – this enables your body to take the load and power of the kite while your arms steer and control the kite.

'Kiting is amazing; one day you can be doing tricks and the next be in waves on a surfboard. It's important to get lessons at a BKSA school to learn this exciting sport easily and safely'

Sam Light
UK Freestyle Champion 2014

Photo: BKSA



KITESURFING

STAYING SAFE

ALWAYS:

- tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back
- check your equipment for damage before use
- wear your kite leash
- consider other water users – learn surf etiquette and rights of way
- secure your kite firmly when on the beach and wind up lines if not in use
- wear a suitably fitted approved buoyancy aid and helmet



NEVER:

- ride in conditions above your capability
- get someone to land and launch your kite who has not received training
- ride or launch near other beach users, animals or objects on the land or in the water
- ride in offshore winds without safety boat cover.

Photo: NAISH



STAND UP PADDLE BOARDING



The BSUPA (British Stand Up Paddle Association) is the UK's body for stand up paddle boarding. For further information, accredited training centres and recognised schools visit bsupa.org.uk.

EQUIPMENT

Together with the basic safety equipment, you'll need the following kit to get started:



Paddle board – many sizes and shapes from around 2.5m to 5.5m. It's ideal to start with a board around 3.4m long by 75cm wide.

Paddle – you need a good paddle, as long as your height plus 20cm.

Leash – use a heavy-duty leash the same length as the board.

'Riding a SUP is fun in both flat water and in surf; it's a sport that is great for the whole family and has some real health benefits including overall fitness and core strength, and it's a good stress reliever.'

Simon Bassett
BSUPA Head Coach

Photo: BSUPA

Photo: Jon Parker

Photo: BSUPA

STAYING SAFE

ALWAYS:

- tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back
- wear your leash so you don't lose your board
- check the weather forecast and tide times
- consider other water users – learn surf etiquette and rights of way
- find a quieter spot if the lineup is really busy.

NEVER:

- ⊘ go alone
- leave without a signalling or communication device
- paddle in offshore winds without safety boat cover
- underestimate the forces of nature but be aware of your environment
- ditch your board – it will keep you afloat in an emergency and make you easier to find
- get on the water in conditions above your capability.

WE ARE THE RNLI

THE CHARITY THAT SAVES LIVES AT SEA.

EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR, PEOPLE GET INTO TROUBLE IN THE WATER. AND THE RNLI IS HERE TO HELP. SINCE OUR FORMATION IN 1824, LIFEBOAT CREWS AND LIFEGUARDS HAVE SAVED OVER 142,000 PEOPLE.

IN 2016 ALONE, 558 LIVES WERE SAVED.

In the UK and Ireland, 237 lifeboat stations provide a 24-hour rescue service along 19,000 miles of coastline. While 240 beaches in the UK and Channel Islands host seasonal lifeguards and our Flood Rescue Team is on call to help during floods.

In 2016 RNLI crews rescued 8,643 people and lifeguards responded to 16,500 incidents.

Our International Team works with partners to tackle drowning in at risk communities all around the world. And across the UK and Ireland, community safety teams help explain the risks and share safety knowledge.

MORE THAN 22,000 RNLI VOLUNTEER FUNDRAISERS SUPPORT OUR LIFESAVING WORK.

When someone is drowning in the surf seconds count, so we need expert lifesavers on the beach ready to act. Around 95% of our lifeguards' work is preventative – they look out for potential problems before they develop into something worse, and give helpful safety advice and information to beachgoers. In 2016 our lifeguards carried out 2.79M preventative actions.

FUNDED BY YOU

The RNLI aims to continue expanding its lifeguard service around the coast. As a charity, the RNLI relies on voluntary financial support including gifts in Wills, which help fund 6 out of 10 lifeboat launches.

With more people using our beaches and seas, the demand on our services is greater than ever and our running costs for 2016 were £177.3M (€206.6M), that's around £485,000 (€566,027) per day.

Whether it's volunteering your time, raising money, remembering us in your Will or buying a souvenir from one of our shops, the RNLI relies on your generous support to save lives at sea. We can't do it without you.

LIFESAVING ADVICE AND INFORMATION

A range of free resources and practical advice are available at RNLI.org/RespectTheWater to promote sea, beach and commercial fishing safety and to support primary and secondary school teachers.

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY ACTS

People from all walks of life help the RNLI to save lives at sea. Thousands of volunteer crew members, lifeguards, shore helpers, committee members and fundraisers give their time, skill and commitment, supported by specialist staff.

Training is vital – it turns volunteers into lifesavers. Every year the RNLI delivers the highest quality of training at its college in Poole, at its lifeboat stations and on the beaches.

Phone 0300 300 9990 (UK) or 1800 991 802 (Ireland), or go to RNLI.org to donate now and help save lives at sea. Thank you.





Lifeboats

If you see someone in difficulty,
never attempt a rescue.
Call **999** or **112**
and ask for the Coastguard



Organisation/Club stamp

Royal National Lifeboat Institution
West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HZ
Tel: 0300 300 9990
Email: Community_Safety@rnli.org.uk
RNLI.org/RespectTheWater

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

Royal National Lifeboat Institution, a charity registered in England and Wales (209603) and Scotland (SC037736). Registered charity number 20003326 in the Republic of Ireland

SAP Code: BEA019