

Rip Currents

What is a rip current?

A rip current is a powerful horizontal current that pulls people away from the shore. The smaller the beach and the bigger the waves, the stronger the rip current. Drowning happens when people pulled offshore by rip currents are unable to keep themselves afloat and swim to shore.

How do rip currents form?

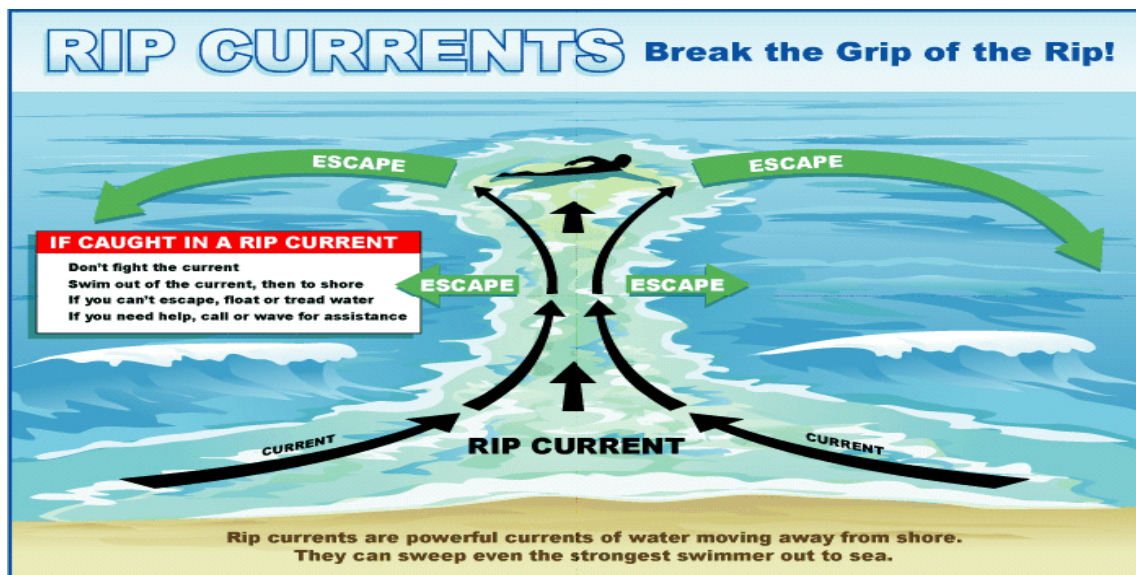
Rip currents are formed when waves break near the shoreline, piling up water between the breaking waves and the beach. This water returns as a rip current.

Where should I look for rip currents?

Rip currents can occur at any beach with breaking waves. Rip currents most typically form at low spots or breaks in sandbars, and also near structures such as groins, jetties and piers.

How can you tell if there's a rip current?

There are several visual clues to spotting rip currents: A break in the incoming wave pattern, a channel of churning, choppy water, a channel with a different water color, or foam or objects moving steadily away from shore.



What can you do before swimming?

- Know the signs of a rip current, and be on the lookout!
- Warn others if you see a rip current.
- Be especially careful when swimming on windy, wavy days.

What can you do if you see someone caught in a rip current?

- Keep yourself from getting caught in the current and warn other swimmers.
- Throw a flotation device to the swimmer caught in the rip.

What can you do to escape a rip current?

- Don't fight the current by trying to swim straight to shore. Keep calm – Don't Panic!
- Escape the current by swimming in a direction parallel to the shoreline.
- If you are unable to escape by swimming, float or tread water. Wait until the current weakens. When free of the current, swim at an angle toward shore.
- If you feel you can't reach the shore draw attention to yourself, face the shore and call or wave for help.

Undertows

What is an undertow?

A strong seaward bottom current returning the water of broken waves back out to sea. This can pull people under the water. If an undertow pulls you down:

- Take a deep breath and wait it out. You'll come up naturally in a few seconds.
- Bring your knees up under your body so you can get a good push off the bottom, like an uncoiling spring. Repeat this process until in chest-deep water, and then start swimming.
- Don't give in to panic. Staying calm will save your life.

Swimming Advisory

There are strong, dangerous ocean currents (rips & undertows) at beaches in Aceh and North Sumatra. There are no properly trained or equipped lifeguards and limited local knowledge of the post tsunami currents.

Continue to go to beaches to relax but it is strongly recommended you do not swim - 7 people have drowned in 9 months. If you do swim the following recommendations are suggested. These are not intended to supplant your own organizations' guidelines which should take primacy. In addition you should note that reading the advisory above and following all the recommendations below will not guarantee your safety. At best you might improve your chances slightly. A bad current will take you regardless of your adherence to any recommendations or your swimming ability.

- Don't swim alone. Swim with a strong swimmer.
- Swim in light clothing.
- Have an experienced local person identify the rips & undertows. If in doubt - Don't swim!
- If you aren't an experienced and strong ocean swimmer then: Don't swim! (In this context experience in the Med, swimming pools, lakes don't count).
- Even if you feel you are a strong swimmer - Do not go beyond waist deep. NB this in itself might not save you from a strong current.
- Have communications, medical kit and transport to hand on the beach.
- Be aware of your own ability. The sea off Banda Aceh is not the place for inexperienced ocean swimmers or a place to learn to surf.
- Act responsibly. If you do not assess your ability honestly you may die pointlessly and risk other people's lives as they try to save you.
- Not drowning is a test of your intelligence – not your swimming ability.