Basic Beach Safety

F - FIND the red and yellow flags and swim between them – they mark the safest place to swim at the beach and the area where lifesavers and lifeguards patrol. Only swim or surf at a patrolled beach.

L - LOOK at the safety signs – they help you identify potential dangers and daily conditions at the beach.

A - ASK a surf lifesaver or a lifeguard for some good advice – surf conditions can change quickly, so always check before you enter the water.

G - GET a friend to swim with you – you should never swim alone and parents should always supervise their children when they are in the water.

S - STICK your hand up for help – if you get into trouble in the water, stay calm and raise your arm to signal for assistance. Don't try to swim against a current or rip, but float with it.

And remember:

- Never swim at unpatrolled beaches
- Never ever swim at night
- Never swim under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Never run and dive into the water

Marine Stingers
Australian beaches are full of underwater life, some of which can cause pain or discomfort to humans. Stingers, such as jellyfish, can be quite common at beaches in the summer months.

Important information on how to protect yourself from stingers and how to treat stings:
For NSW beaches and other non-tropical areas (http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Things_That_Sting_2)
For tropical areas like the NT and parts of QLD and WA (http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Things_That_Sting_1)

Rips
Rip currents are strong currents that begin from the shore and run out to sea, like a river. They can be dangerous to inexperienced swimmers as they can carry you more than 100 metres offshore in less than a minute and are a major source of drowning.
How to identify a rip: [http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Rip_Currents](http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Rip_Currents)

Getting out of a rip:

1. Do not panic – a rip will only take you out to sea, it will NOT pull you underwater
2. Do not swim against the rip – you will tire quickly; instead swim to the side (perpendicular to the rip) or let it carry you out behind the waves and signal for help

Waves

Are Waves Dangerous?

All types of waves are dangerous in very large surf conditions. Unless you are a very experienced swimmer or surfer, don't go in once waves are higher than 1.5 – 2 m. If it's bigger than you, it's time to go to the pool!

Types of Breaking Waves

*Plunging waves* have the classic tube or barrel shape and are often called dumping waves. They occur when waves travel from deep water to shallow water very quickly and have to slow down rapidly. That's why you get plunging waves on steep beaches, on sandbars, and at the outside edge of rock and coral reefs. Be very respectful of plunging waves. Plunging waves are the most dangerous type of breaking wave as they can easily slam you into the bottom with a lot of force. Many spinal and head injuries are caused this way. Avoid bodysurfing these waves and always, always, always bodysurf with your arms held out in front. Surging waves can also be dangerous as they can easily knock both children and adults over as they rush up and back down the beach.

![Plunging Waves](image1)

*Spilling waves* are much gentler with the crest of the wave gently spilling down the front face of the wave as it breaks. They occur when waves travel from deep water to shallow water over a wide, gentle sloping bottom. These are the safest type of wave to swim in.

![Spilling Waves](image2)
*Surging waves* do not plunge or spill, but bulge up near the shoreline and then rush up the beach very quickly. The backrush is equally quick and is often mistaken as undertow. They occur on most beaches that have a moderate slope usually during smaller swell.

**Signs/Flags**
To find out more about Beach Flags and Signs visit the Beach Safe website.
Flags: [http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Beach_Safety_Flags](http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Beach_Safety_Flags)
Signs: [http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Beach_Safety_Signs](http://beachsafe.org.au/Visiting_the_beach/Beach_Safety/Beach_Safety_Signs)

For more information on Australian beaches and beach safety, and to download a beach safety brochure, visit [http://beachsafe.org.au/](http://beachsafe.org.au/)

Information in this document was sourced from BeachSafe (http://beachsafe.org.au/), Science of the Surf (www.scienceofthesurf.com) and (www.sls.com.au/).