

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE AT THE BEACH THIS SUMMER



A trip to the Outer Banks' beautiful beaches is an enjoyable and memorable experience for many visitors and families. Whether you're going swimming, sailing or surfing, taking strolls in the sand or laying out to catch some sun, or participating in any of the many other activities at our coastal attractions, we want your time at the beach to be as safe as it is fun.

Here are some tips and resources to help you stay safe.

Exposure to the Sun

Enjoying the sunshine means also being aware of the dangers of prolonged exposure to the sun. Proper and regular application of sunscreen to exposed skin will help [protect your skin](#) from sunburn and sun damage. Remember to reapply sunscreen every time you get out of the water.

Rip Currents

Rip currents are channeled currents of water that flow away from shore, and can quickly pull even the strongest swimmers out to sea. Since the current flows under water, it's important to know the signs of a rip current and avoid the water in that area.

According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#), indicators of rip currents include:

- A channel of churning, choppy water.
- Notable differences in water color.
- Lines of foam, seaweed or debris moving steadily seaward.
- A break in the incoming wave pattern.

Check the [National Weather Service Surf Zone Forecasts](#) for the latest rip current, high and low tide and surf height information. Depending on which beach you're headed to, you'll want to check the Outer Banks or Wilmington regional forecasts.

Flags on public beaches also indicate rip current alerts: green for low hazard and calm conditions, yellow for medium hazard with moderate surf conditions, and red for high hazard with rough conditions indicating rip currents. Be sure to look for flags on lifeguard stations and read the sign keys when arriving at the beach.

If you see warning signs of rip currents or moderate or high hazard flags, stay out of the water and alert others to do the same. If caught in a rip current, you should stay calm to conserve energy and allow yourself to think clearly. Don't try to fight the current. Instead, swim out in a direction following the shoreline and swim toward shore once you're out of the current.

Beach Warning Flags

Watch for flags posted at many beach access sites signifying water conditions.

Lifeguarded Beaches

The Outer Banks welcomes several million guests annually and many of these people enjoy our shores and waters. For travelers who prefer swimming on beaches with lifeguard stations, [please consult this chart](#).

Jellyfish

Jellyfish and Portuguese man o' war stings are best avoided by staying aware of beach surroundings. In the case of a sting, it should be treated quickly.

Jellyfish have clear, jellylike bodies, with tentacles with stinging structures hanging below, and swim under water. The Portuguese man o' war has a colorful air-filled bladder that keeps it afloat on the surface of the water, with tentacles stretching underneath. If you spot either, stay calm, get out of the water and alert others.

Both inject venom when they sting, and can sting even after they're dead, so avoid touching those washed up on the beach. Common sting symptoms include red welts, blisters, pain, tingling and itching. To treat a sting:

- Wear gloves or other hand covering to remove tentacles.
- Wash the affected area with vinegar or rubbing alcohol.
- Do not rinse with water, which could release more venom.
- Contact a lifeguard or doctor for further treatment as needed.

Sharks

Most shark encounters with humans are cases of mistaken identity. Swimmers, surfers and others in the water may splash and present visual targets that mislead the shark, causing it to mistake people for prey. Most attacks occur in near-shore waters, between sandbars, or near steep drop-offs where sharks feed.

Chances of encountering a shark in North Carolina waters are very low. To further reduce your risk, consider the following tips from the [North Carolina Aquarium](#):

- Do not enter the water or swim near a pier, as they attract baitfish that sharks feed on and are a very likely place for sharks to swim if they come close to shore.
- Avoid waters being used by sport or commercial fishermen, especially if there are signs of baitfish or feeding activity. Diving seabirds are good indicators of such action.
- Always stay in groups. Sharks are more likely to attack a solitary individual.
- Avoid being in the water during dusk, darkness or twilight hours. This is when sharks are most active and have a sensory advantage.

- Wearing shiny jewelry in the water is discouraged because the reflected light resembles the sheen of fish scales.
- Avoid wearing brightly colored contrasting clothing in the water. Sharks see contrast particularly well.
- Refrain from excess splashing to minimize your risk.
- Exercise caution when swimming between sandbars or near steep drop-offs. These are favorite hangouts for sharks.
- Do not enter the water if bleeding. A shark's sense of smell is acute.

Severe Weather

Be attentive to any weather-related watches or warnings issued by the National Weather Service or local authorities, and follow carefully any precautionary directions or evacuation notices from public safety officials. When thunderstorms or lightning threaten, seek cover promptly in a large enclosed building, or if not possible, an enclosed metal vehicle. The National Weather Service recommends waiting 30 minutes until after the last thunder crack before returning to the beach. You can always get the latest on tropical storm forecasts from the [National Hurricane Center](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov).

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