5 Ocean Safety Tips for the Whole Family

By: Lauren Tjaden

KID FRIENDLY, OUTDOORSY

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How to help keep your whole gang safe

Florida's beaches are a glittering playground made of sun and sand -- and by all means you should enjoy the water!

You can splash in the shallows, ride the waves, or just bob up and down in the surf.

But before you dip one toe in the ocean, make sure you know these simple rules to keep you safe.

1. Understand what beach flags mean.

Florida's beaches, like this beauty in Englewood, offer a world of fun. Make sure you know these simple rules to stay safe.

Credit: Lauren Tjaden

Florida's beach warning flag program uses flags in four colors accompanied by interpretive signs along the beach to explain the meaning of each color.

- **Double Red:** Danger! Water Closed to Public
- **Single Red:** High Hazard, High Surf and/or Strong Currents
- **Yellow:** Medium Hazard, Moderate Surf and/or Currents
- **Green:** Low Hazard, Calm Conditions, Exercise Caution
- **Purple:** Dangerous Marine Life (Usually Jellyfish)

An absence of beach flags doesn't guarantee that it's safe.

Stingrays bury themselves in the sand, often in water that's
only inches deep. They only sting in self defense, so doing the
'stingray shuffle' will give them the chance to flee -- something
they are happy to do.

3. Know how to get out of a rip current.

These powerful, fast-moving channels of water typically flow
from the shoreline to beyond the area where waves break.
They can form on any beach where waves are breaking, often
near sandbars, jetties and piers. If you are caught in one,
NOAA recommends:

- Keep calm. Don't fight the rip current.
- To get out of the rip current, swim sideways, parallel to the
  beach. This will get you out of the rip current so you can
  swim back in with the waves helping you along.
- When out of the rip current, swim at an angle away from
  the rip current and toward shore.
- If you can't escape this way, try to float or calmly tread
  water. Rip current strength eventually weakens offshore.
  When it does, swim away from the rip current toward
  shore.
- If at any time you are unable to reach the shore, draw
  attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and
  yell for help.

It's always safer to swim to near a lifeguard.

5. Beware of lightning.

Lightning in Florida is a real danger. That goes double on the
beach. If you hear thunder, get off the beach. The
thunderstorms that tend to pop up on summer afternoons
usually pass quickly, so you can probably get back to enjoying
the outdoors soon.

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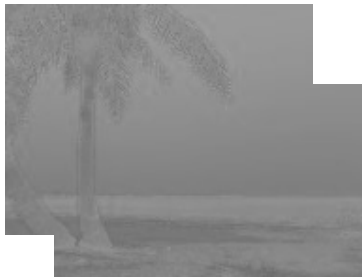

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