



Lifeboats

# WATER SAFETY KEY MESSAGES BOOKLET



Version 2

# WEATHER

We always recommend that people check the weather forecast before going in, on or around the water and be aware of the changing weather conditions as they may not follow the forecast. People should always be prepared to change their plans or cancel their trip.

Points to discuss when talking about checking the weather forecast:

- **Wind strength.** This can cause a rapid change in water conditions and can also affect people when they're around the coastline. Extra care should be taken when strong wind is forecasted. We always advise people to take extra care around the coast when a storm or strong wind warning is in place.
- **Wind direction.** Extra care should be taken when the wind is blowing offshore (wind coming off the land) as there is a higher risk of getting blown out to sea.
- **Wind direction and tidal flow.** When these are opposing each other (wind against tide) this can cause the water to change and can become very rough.

## Air and water temperature

The average UK and Irish water temperature is 12°C which is classed as cold water even in the summer. People should wear suitable protection for the conditions (eg a wetsuit or suncream). Wind chill and exposure to the water can easily catch people out. There are lots of weather apps and websites available. For general weather forecasts and weather warnings we recommend using the Met Office. They also produce specific forecasts, like the inshore waters forecast and shipping forecasts. Other popular weather forecast sites and apps include Windfinder, Windguru, and Magicseaweed.

## Swell forecast

In addition to checking the weather forecast, people should also check the swell forecast, especially those activities being undertaken along the coast such as rock angling and coastal walking. Popular swell forecast websites and apps include Windfinder, Windguru and Magicseaweed. Points to discuss when talking about checking the swell forecast:

- **Wave height.** Bigger swells could result in coastal locations which are not normally reached by waves being swamped.
- **Swell direction.** This also needs to be considered in relation to the tide and wind direction as it can increase the size of the swell.
- **Power of the waves.** These may take people by surprise and can knock them off their feet.

## Stormy weather

Stormy weather can make our seas particularly dangerous and unpredictable. Large unexpected waves and swells are a major risk and can catch people out.

People need to be aware that the coastline will be exceptionally treacherous during storms. The large swell will mean that areas normally accessible at low tide may be cut off by storm surges. Sea walls and harbour areas may become inundated with surface flooding and large waves.



Photo: Steve Jones

Find out more: [RNLI.org/WeatherAndTides](https://www.rnli.org/WeatherAndTides)

## TIDES

Tides are the rise and fall of sea levels caused by the combined gravitational forces exerted by the moon, the sun and the rotation of the earth. Different locations are affected by the tide in different ways and although there are tidal predictions, the tide still catches people out and can be affected by weather systems. Tidal forecasts often display the time and height of high water and low water as well as if it is a spring or neap tide. Points to discuss when talking about tides:

- **Tidal range.** The amount the water rises and falls often catches people out. Some areas have a very large tidal range and it is at its maximum at spring tides.
- **Spring tides.** Spring tides are the highest high tides and the lowest low tides. The dates of spring tides can be forecast. Spring tides can expose areas not normally uncovered by the tide and the water moves very quickly during a spring tide.
- **Tidal direction** (for on the water activity planning). This needs to be considered to make sure that you can return safely.
- **Variable factors.** Storm surges, wind direction and tidal, wind strength and atmospheric pressure can cause local variations.



High tide



Low tide

Photos: RNLI/Nigel Millard

## Tidal cut off

This is a major cause of RNLI call outs. People are often unaware that they are in potential danger and, as such, are not prepared. There are a number of key areas that cause tidal cut off including:

- **Causeways.** Access to an island that covers and uncovers during a tidal cycle.
- **Sandbanks.** Flat sandy areas with raised banks that allow the tide to flow in all around, potentially leaving you stranded.
- **Headlands.** Headlands and rocky outcrops can create isolated bays. These bays can get cut off by an incoming tide. Cliffs are hazardous if there is not a safe exit.

## Tidal cut off advice

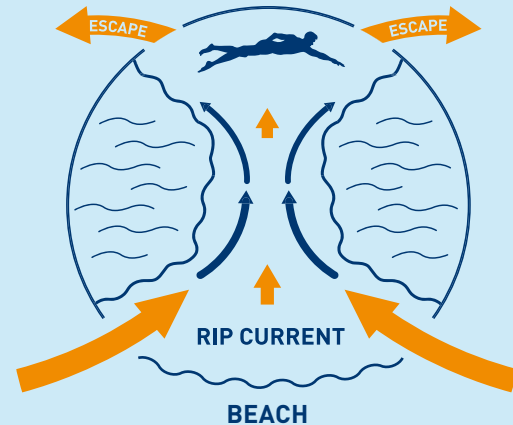
Our advice for tidal cut off:

- **Always check the tide times and heights and keep a look out for incoming tide. Use tide timetables or a tidal prediction app like AnyTide.** Make sure you have enough time to return safely. If in doubt, seek local advice.
- **Always carry a means of calling for help on your person.** Call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard if you are in danger or you see someone in danger of being cut off by the tide.
- **Tell someone else where you're going and when you'll be back.** They can raise the alarm with the coastguard by calling 999 or 112 if you are overdue.

Find out more: [RNLI.org/WeatherAndTides](https://www.rnli.org/WeatherAndTides)

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## RIP CURRENTS



## What to do if you're caught in a rip

- Stay calm – don't panic.
- If you can stand, wade. Don't try to swim.
- If you have an inflatable or board, keep hold of it to help you float.
- Raise your hand and shout for help loudly.
- Don't swim directly against the rip or you'll get exhausted.
- Swim parallel to the beach until free of the rip, then make for shore.
- If you can't swim, float. Lean back in the water and extend your arms and legs.

Find out more: [RNLI.org/BeachSafety](https://www.rnli.org/BeachSafety)



## BEACH SAFETY



### KEY MESSAGES

- **Always try to choose a lifeguarded beach and swim between the red and yellow flags.** If you can't make it to a lifeguarded beach, learn more about your chosen location before you go, and read local safety signs.
- **Check the weather forecast and tide times.** See Weather section on page 10.
- **Inflatables are not designed for use in the sea.** Inflatables are a major cause of summer incidents. If you are in trouble, stay with your inflatable and call and signal for help.
- **Be aware that even on hot days the sea temperature can be cold.** See Flotation section on page 7.
- **Avoid rip currents.** Rips are strong currents running out to sea. They can take you from the shallows very quickly and leave you out of your depth. They are especially powerful in larger surf, but they're also found around river mouths, estuaries and man-made structures like piers and groynes. Rips can catch even the most experienced beachgoers out, so ask lifeguards for advice on how you can avoid rips.



## BEACH SAFETY

### Know your flags



#### Red and yellow flags

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



#### Black and white chequered flags

For surfboards, stand up paddleboards, 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. Never use inflatables when the windsock is flying.

## Inflatables



Blow-up toys and airbeds are designed for pools, not the sea where they can easily be blown offshore.

If you must use them at the beach, then:

- ensure children are closely supervised
- keep nearby
- only use between the red and yellow flags
- follow the lifeguards' advice
- do not take out in big waves
- do not use when the orange windsock is flying, as this indicates offshore winds.

## Supervision of children

- Children should always be supervised.
- Agree a meeting point in case of separation. If the beach runs a children's safety scheme, using wristbands or tickets, take part.

## What to do if a child goes missing

- Calmly check the surroundings first, ensuring other children remain supervised.
- Contact the lifeguards or police and keep them informed.
- Let all searchers know once the child is found.

Find out more: [RNLI.org/BeachSafety](https://www.rnli.org/BeachSafety)



# INLAND WATER SAFETY

The RNLI saves lives on coastal waters, but we also operate on inland waterways. These include the River Thames, Loch Ness in Scotland, Lough Erne in Northern Ireland, and Loughs Derg and Ree in Ireland.

## KEY MESSAGES

- **The water is cold, so if someone enters the water, there is a risk of cold water shock.** They should float until they feel calm and then swim to safety if they can.
- **Beware hidden dangers.** There can be objects below the water that cannot be seen, which may cause entrapment and injury.
- **Take care and be wary of all edges around the waterside.** Slips and falls happen in all locations. If you can, stick to designated paths.
- **Look out for safety and warning signs.**
- **Make sure you always carry a means of calling for help on your person.** Call 999 or 112 if you or someone else is in trouble in the water. The operator will be able to direct you to the appropriate emergency service.



## CALLING FOR HELP

If you see someone in trouble in the water, call for help and tell the call handler someone is in trouble in the water.

If you are at the coast using a mobile phone, call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard. Once you have called for help:

- **stay at a safe distance and do not enter the water**
- **encourage them to float on their back**
- **look for anything you can throw to help them float, eg public rescue equipment (such as a lifering)**
- **keep watch until help arrives.**

### Devices

There are a number of different devices that can be used as a means for calling for help. With all activities we strongly encourage people to take a means of calling for help that is most suitable to their activity. We advise that they know how to use it and where it is a personal device to keep it on their person.

### KEY

#### PERSONAL OR VESSEL

The intended location for the storage of the device.

#### GMDSS

It is recommended that you choose a Global Maritime Distress Safety System approved by the International Maritime Organisation. These are mandatory for certain vessels.

#### ONE-TO-ONE

The alert will be received by one person.

#### ONE-TO-MANY

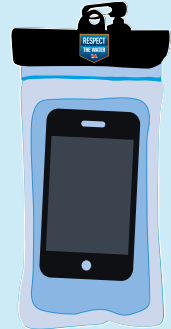
The alert will be received by multiple recipients.

#### SafeTrx

This free app monitors your journeys and alerts emergency contacts if you fail to return home on time. Download and use the RYA or ISA SafeTrx app to log, track and send alerts about your trip.

### Mobile phone (in a waterproof pouch)

Personal or vessel	<b>PERSONAL</b>
GMDSS approved	<b>NO</b>
One-to-one or one-to-many	<b>ONE-TO-ONE</b> Call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard, who will launch the correct search and rescue services.
Range	<b>UP TO 18 NMILES</b> Network dependent, mobile coverage is generally poor around the coast, although coverage for voice calls is usually better than data.



### Things to consider

- Keep your mobile in a waterproof pouch. You should wear this on your person so it's within easy reach - it's no use if you can't reach it.
- Smart phones can provide a location, but emergency calls should be made by voice (call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard).
- Download and use the RYA/Irish Sailing SafeTrx app that can be used to log, track and send alerts about your trip.

You should still call 999 or 112 even if your own mobile phone network has no coverage, as your phone will try to connect to any other available network.

# CORE MESSAGES

While each activity comes with its own specific risks and safety advice, there are a few messages that cover all activity areas.

## Flotation

- Always wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid.
- Know how to float in an emergency.

## Calling for help

- Always carry a means of calling for help and keep it on your person.

## Weather and tides

- Always check the weather forecast and tide times.

## In case of an emergency

- Always tell someone else where you're going and when you'll be back.
- If you see someone in trouble call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard.

Find out more: [RNLI.org/safety](https://www.rnli.org/safety)

### The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution, a charity registered in England and Wales (209603), Scotland (SC037736), the Republic of Ireland (CHY 2678 and 20003326), the Bailiwick of Jersey (14), the Isle of Man (1308 and 006329F), the Bailiwick of Guernsey and Alderney, of West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HZ