

## **SAFETY BY THE SEA**

The sun is shining and for many of us, that means flocking to the seaside in order to stay cool. But the sea can be a dangerous place, so here's how to stay safe by learning your beach flags and knowing what precautions to take when by the water.

What summer holiday is complete without at least one day at the beach? You've got your bucket and spade, your sandwiches, your factor 50 and you're ready to cool off in the water. But while massive waves might be an obvious indicator that the sea can be a treacherous place, it's the less obvious hazards that are harder to see that are often the most dangerous.

Fortunately, there are organisations and safety measures in place to keep us from coming to harm if obeyed. Beach safety flags are one of the most important signs to learn as they are designed to let us know when, and where, it is safe to enter the water. But how many of us know what each flag means?

### **Red and yellow flag**

Swimming Area – For most beachgoers these are the flags you'll be looking for if you're hoping to go in the sea. The area between two red and yellow flags means that lifeguards are patrolling here, and is suitable for anyone wanting to make a splash, have a swim or for those using bodyboards.

Be aware: Always remember to keep a check on where you are in relation to the flags when in the sea. It's surprising how quickly the tide and current can move you along the shore.

### **Red flag**

No Swimming – A red flag is simple – do not swim or go in the sea here. While it may look safe to do so, there could be rough conditions forecast or there could be riptides or strong currents in this area.

### **Black and white checkered flag**

Surfing Area – The area between two black and white checkered flags is marked for surfers. You should not be in this area for general swimming, paddling or splashing around as there is danger of being struck by a surfer on the move or a stray surfboard during an involuntary dismount.

## **Orange Windsock**

Strong Wind Conditions – An orange windsock anywhere on the beach is used as an indicator of strong wind conditions. You should never use any inflatables while this is flying.

## **Tides and currents**

Any potential visit to the beach should start with a check of the tide times. Tide times vary daily and follow a reliable timetable that is easy to follow and understand. A simple online search will show the tide information for the beach you're heading to, or visit [www.tidetimes.org.uk](http://www.tidetimes.org.uk)

Rip currents are dangerously strong currents that run out to sea from the shoreline, taking you out involuntarily into deeper water. These currents are hard to spot but can be identified by what the RNLI describe as 'a channel of churning, choppy water on the sea's surface'. The best way to avoid a rip tide/current is to only swim between red and yellow flags on a lifeguarded beach.

## **Boat Safety**

Sea safety extends beyond the beachgoers too. Boatowners or those looking to hire small boats, ribs or dinghies need to ensure they know the risks and are fully prepared before going out on the water. Throughout summer (and all year round) volunteer organisations like the Exmouth National Coastwatch Institution (NCI) work together with the RNLI to act as the eyes, ears and voices for the town's water and beach users.

But they can only do so much, and basic safety and preparation is down to you. All water users are encouraged to wear lifejackets at all times and to use kill cords when helming a RIB (rigid inflatable boat). Mariners are also strongly encouraged to check their radio is working before commencing their voyage as it is organisations like Exmouth NCI that will be listening out for any Mayday calls. You don't want to find out your radio isn't working when you need it the most.

As with anything, being prepared and understanding the risks and how to reduce them is the key to a fun, yet safe, experience at the seaside.

For more information on beach safety and how to stay safe in the sea, visit [www.rnli.org](http://www.rnli.org)