



Chris Brewster, United States Lifesaving Association

A narrow, darker gap between areas of breaking waves is one sign of a rip current.

## Facts about rip currents

- ◆ Rip current speeds vary. Average speeds are 1-2 feet per second, but they have been measured as fast as 8 feet per second—faster than an Olympic swimmer!
- ◆ Rip currents can be very narrow or more than 50 yards wide.
- ◆ Sometimes a rip current ends just beyond the line of breaking waves; however, others may continue to flow hundreds of yards offshore.
- ◆ Rip currents do not pull people under the water—they pull people away from shore.
- ◆ Rip currents are sometimes mistakenly called undertow or riptides but these terms are not correct. Only the term rip currents is technically correct.

## Safety tips

- ◆ Know how to swim.
- ◆ Never swim alone.
- ◆ If in doubt, don't go out.
- ◆ Swim near a lifeguard.

**United States Lifesaving Association statistics indicate that the chance of death by drowning at a beach protected by lifeguards is 1 in 18 million.**

## Where can I get more information about rip currents?

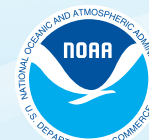
- ◆ Before you leave for the beach, check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach conditions.
- ◆ When you arrive at the beach, ask lifeguards about rip currents and other hazards.
- ◆ More information about rip currents can be found at the following web sites:

[weather.gov/safety/ripcurrent](http://weather.gov/safety/ripcurrent)

[usla.org/ripcurrents](http://usla.org/ripcurrents)



NOAA's National Weather Service, National Sea Grant College Program, and the United States Lifesaving Association are working to educate the public on the dangers of rip currents.



NOAA's National Weather Service  
Analyze, Forecast, and Support Office  
[www.weather.gov/safety/ripcurrent](http://www.weather.gov/safety/ripcurrent)

NOAA PA 201950

# BREAK THE GRIP OF THE RIP

## RIP CURRENTS!



**R**ip currents account for more than 80% of rescues performed by surf beach lifeguards.

### What are rip currents?

- ◆ Rip currents are channelized currents of water flowing away from shore at surf beaches.
- ◆ Rip currents typically form at breaks in sandbars, and also near structures such as jetties and piers.
- ◆ Rip currents are commonly found on all surf beaches, including Great Lakes beaches.

### Why are rip currents dangerous?

- ◆ Rip currents pull people away from shore.
- ◆ Rip current speeds can vary from moment to moment and can quickly increase to become dangerous to anyone entering the surf.
- ◆ Rip currents can sweep even the strongest swimmer away from shore.

### Rip Current



Rip currents often form near coastal structures.

Dr. Tom Herington, Stevens Institute of Technology



Lifeguard Captain Nick Steers, County of Los Angeles Fire Department

Rip currents sometimes generate a plume of visible sediment moving away from shore.

### What are clues that a rip current may be present?

- ◆ A narrow gap of darker, seemingly calmer water between areas of breaking waves and whitewater.
- ◆ A channel of churning, choppy water.
- ◆ A difference in water color.
- ◆ A line of foam, seaweed or debris moving seaward.

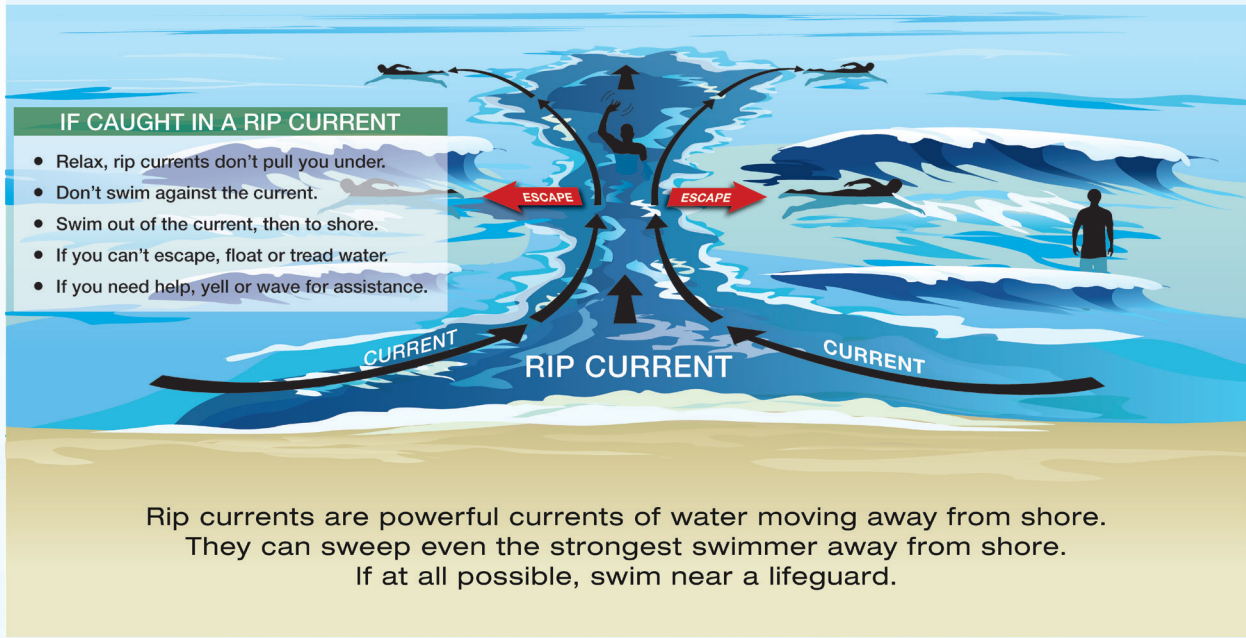
### What if I'm caught in a rip current?

- ◆ Relax, rip currents don't pull you under.
- ◆ Don't swim against the current.
- ◆ You may be able to escape by swimming out of the current in a direction following the shoreline, or toward breaking waves, then at an angle toward the beach.
- ◆ You may be able to escape by floating or treading water if the current circulates back toward shore.
- ◆ If you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself. If you need help, yell and wave for assistance.

## RIP CURRENTS

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

- IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT**
- Relax, rip currents don't pull you under.
  - Don't swim against the current.
  - Swim out of the current, then to shore.
  - If you can't escape, float or tread water.
  - If you need help, yell or wave for assistance.



Rip currents are powerful currents of water moving away from shore. They can sweep even the strongest swimmer away from shore. If at all possible, swim near a lifeguard.

### How do I help someone else?

- Don't become a victim while trying to help someone else!**  
Many people have died trying to rescue rip current victims.
- ◆ Get help from a lifeguard.
  - ◆ If a lifeguard is not present, call 9-1-1, then try to direct the victim to swim following the shoreline to escape.
  - ◆ If possible, throw the rip current victim something that floats.
  - ◆ Never enter the water without a flotation device.



A lifeguard rescues a swimmer caught in a rip current.

Courtesy of Discovery Communications