

Rip Current Information

Rip currents can threaten any beach, and are not exclusively a Pinellas County problem.

Rip currents can occur as a result of conditions from hurricanes, tropical storms, cold fronts and thunderstorms bringing in stronger waves and currents which will break soft sandbars and cause rip current conditions.

It is important for beach visitors to monitor weather reports to know when rip currents are more likely to form.

Beach Safety Tips to Avoid Rip Current Dangers:

Rip currents are likely to be strongest in areas around jetties and channels where water flows in and out during tide changes.

Beach visitors can speak with lifeguards about conditions before entering the water. On Pinellas County beaches colored flags will be displayed to alert the public when dangerous conditions are present.

Pinellas County has lifeguards present on Fred Howard Park, Sand Key Park and Fort De Soto Park beaches from late March/early April until the week of Labor Day in September.

Lifeguards will be present between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

When no lifeguards are on the beach, the public should look for general conditions and water characteristics that might mean rip currents are present:

- Water discoloration: If a rip current is present, visitors might see a brown tint due to the disturbance of the sandbar that has been affected by the winds and waves.
- Turbulent water. Seaweed, leaves, foam and other debris may be seen floating towards the current and away from shore.

When walking in shallow water, water depth may drop significantly in areas of a sand bar or shore line where a rip current is forming.

Swimmers should also avoid deep holes or jetties during strong wind days.

If there is any doubt about water condition, it is best to stay out.

People Most at Risk for Rip Currents:

- Anyone who is not a strong swimmer
- Intoxicated swimmers
- Unattended children

Parents are also reminded to always keep watch on their children when playing in the water. It is also recommended to outfit children with life jackets and other floatation devices.

What to Do if Caught in a Rip Current?

- Do not fight the current, stay calm
- Swim out of the current parallel to the shore or at a 45 degree angle
- If unable to escape a current, float or tread water until taken into calmer, open water
- Call out for help or wave for assistance

For More Information about Rip Currents:

National Weather Service: www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov

United States Lifesaving Association: www.usla.org