



2017 Summer Water Safety Tips

California Department of Parks and Recreation

www.parks.ca.gov/SafetyTips



Cold Water Immersion and Shock Prevention

- **Don't enter the water if it's too cold.** The average body temperature is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. The average pool temperature is 84 to 86 degrees. Some of California's rivers are currently running at temperatures between 30 to 40 degrees. Such cold temperatures can literally take your breath away.
- **Cold-water immersion is dangerous.** Not wearing a life jacket while recreating in cold water makes it even more perilous.
- Jumping into cold water can cause many **life-threatening effects**, including:
 - An involuntary gasp for air when you're under water which can lead to panic and start the drowning process. It can even trigger cardiac arrest, temporary paralysis and hypothermia.
 - Cold water entering the ear canal can cause vertigo and disorientation. This may confuse swimmers, causing them to venture deeper into the water.
 - Reduces body heat 25 to 30 times faster than air does at the same temperature, and causes impairment that can lead to fatalities.
- Below are some other do's and don'ts for cold water immersion:
 - **Do control breathing, don't gasp.** A sudden unexpected fall into cold water causes an involuntary gasp (or torso) reflex. It takes less than ½ cup of water in a person's lungs to drown. When someone remains calm, they have a greater chance of self-rescue.
 - **Don't panic if you fall into the water.** Stay afloat with the help of a life jacket, regain control of breathing, and keep head above water in view of rescuers. If possible, look for ways to increase buoyancy. If in the water with others, huddle together with everyone facing inwards to help everyone stay afloat and keep warm.
 - **Don't apply heat to extremities** like arms and legs of a rescued victims. This sudden change in temperature could cause cardiac arrest.
 - **Do make sure everyone is wearing a properly-fitted life jacket.** Life jackets that are too big will ride up around your face. If it's too small, it will not be able to keep your body afloat. Life jackets designed for adults will not work for children.



Wear a Life Jacket

- Conditions change quickly in open water and even the best swimmers can misjudge the water and their skills when boating or swimming. Wearing a properly fitted [Coast Guard-approved](#) life jacket can increase survival time.
- A life jacket can also provide some thermal protection against the onset of cold water shock and keep you afloat until someone else can rescue you.
- Correct life jacket use:
 - *Coast Guard-Approved:* All life jackets approved for use by the Coast Guard will have an approval number located on the inside label. Only approved life jackets should be used on the water, and boaters may be cited for lacking proper equipment.
 - *Proper Fit:* Life jacket sizes come with weight or chest measurements, and should fit snug rather than purchased to allow a wearer to “grow into.” A small life jacket may not provide enough flotation to keep a person afloat. One that is too large can slip off upon entry into the water or could ride up around the face and obstruct breathing.
 - *Intended Boating Activity:* Always check the life jacket label to ensure it is approved for the intended boating activity.
 - *Good Condition:* Check the life jacket before using to ensure it is in good condition. Jackets with rips, tears, mildew, loose or missing straps, frayed webbing, broken zippers or buckles, hardened stuffing or faded label instructions lose their strength and buoyancy and must be replaced.
- Need a life jacket? Many locations across the state allow you to borrow a lifejacket for the day or weekend. [View Loaner Stations](#)

Whitewater Rafting and Paddling

- Most California rivers are fed by the mountain snowpack, so they are cold year around. Even on warm, sunny days, rafters and paddlers must be prepared to deal with the water temperatures. The dangers increase as water temperatures decrease below normal body temperature.
- Using pool toys in open water, lakes and rivers is dangerous. They may be made to resemble canoes or whitewater rafts, but they are often made of thin plastic, are easily punctured and usually have only one air inlet. Pool toys are not made for navigation and are difficult to maneuver and steer.
- DBW offers whitewater enthusiasts [informative safety videos](#) online. The dangers of high, fast and cold water safety.



Know your Limits

- Swimming in open water is more difficult than in a swimming pool – people tire more quickly and can get into trouble.
- Many unseen obstacles can be lurking below the water's surface - this is especially the case with this year's high runoff following years of drought. Drought-stricken forests and storm-driven landslides have filled rivers with submerged trees and rocks. Swift water can make these obstacles even more treacherous. DBW recommends guided trips for inexperienced paddlers.

Parental Supervision

- Actively supervise children in and around open bodies of water, giving them your undivided attention. Do not assume that someone is watching them. Appoint a designated "water watcher," taking turns with other adults. Let the children know who is the designated "water watcher".
- Teach children that swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a pool: they need to be aware of uneven surfaces, river currents, ocean undertow and changing weather.

File A Float Plan

- Do file a float plan with someone trusted that includes details about the trip – e.g. launch area, marina, boat, passengers, towing or trailer vehicle, communication equipment and emergency contacts.



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