

News Advisory



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Public Safety Warning

Expect Surf along the California Coast for the Holidays

Come Christmas morning, Santa may be riding a surfboard and wetsuit due to a series of storm systems forecasted to produce large surf along the coastal waters of California.

California State Parks is warning beach visitors of potentially dangerous conditions along California's coast this holiday season. Weather forecasts call for a combination of high tides, large surf and strong currents. In some areas, rain runoff could result in high levels of bacteria in the ocean.

"During periods of big surf, if you must watch the waves, do so from a distance," said Alex Peabody Aquatic Safety Specialist at California State Parks. "Come close, and you risk an unexpected wave sweeping you off the rocks or shore and into potentially dangerous waters."

High tides reaching between 6.8 to 7.1 feet beginning on Saturday, December 22 through Monday, December 24 could cause problems in areas that are prone to coastal flooding. Visitors to some state beaches may find there is little to no beach left in the morning. If these high tides combine with a winter swell, the high tides may create dangerous coastal conditions due to surging water that can wash over rocks and beaches great distances and take visitors by surprise.

West facing beaches along the California coast can expect surf throughout the holidays that may be very powerful at times with resulting rip currents. The surf for Central and Northern California is projected to become very rough on Friday, December 21 with strong winds and waves 10-15 feet high. While the surf is predicted to decrease in size over the weekend, a strong swell from a storm system developing off the Aleutian Islands should reach California's shore by Christmas Eve.

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In addition to the danger from large surf and strong currents, water recreationists must also take precautions from the increased bacteria levels from runoff during the rains. There is a risk of increased bacteria levels in the ocean for a period of at least 72 hours following the end of any measurable precipitation and runoff. Water contact should be avoided during this period near drainpipes, creek outlets, and river mouths.

“Check in with your county environmental health department regarding bacteria levels,” advises Alex Peabody, Aquatic Specialist for California State Parks. “Most coastal area newspapers print the daily water quality readings.”

“During these periods of high surf and stormy weather, there are a number of factors that come together that make water recreation especially dangerous for the public,” said Peabody.

- 1.) High tides can create dangerous coastal conditions in areas that are open to the westerly swells. Inversely, low tides combined with the surf size and direction increases the danger from rip currents along the beaches.
- 2.) The direct angle from the swells produced by these storms impacts the coast of California and produces powerful waves and currents.
- 3.) Long periods between the waves produce deceiving lulls at times. These are called long period swells, which are the amount of time from a fixed point that it takes two consecutive wave crests to pass. These lulls can fool the unknowing or inexperienced beach visitor into thinking the ocean is safe and venturing onto exposed beach and rock areas only to be met with a crashing wave.
- 4.) During high surf events, most waves look consistently large, but every now and then a wave, or a set of waves come in that are far greater in size and can violently wash over rocks, jetties, and beaches.

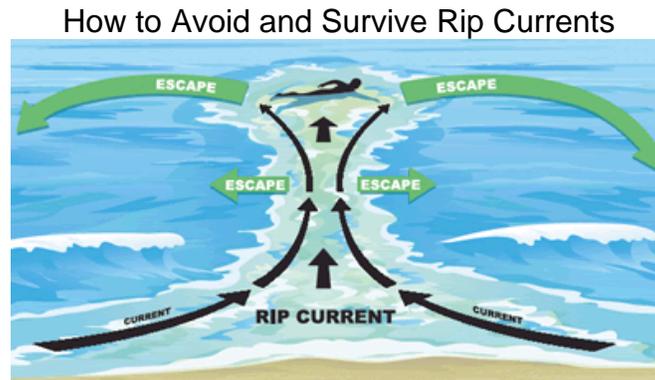
Peabody cautions visitors to avoid exposed beach and rock areas close to the surf line. These areas can seem safe from most breaking waves, but the pattern of breaking waves produces a periodic sequence of large, very strong surges that can wash over rocks and beaches great distances and take visitors by surprise. Watch from a distance, not up close!

Whether you are surfing, swimming, boating, or simply taking in the view along the coast during the holiday, always be safety minded and check the conditions before going. You can always check with your local state park office, or the NOAA Weather Service for the updated coastal information and local conditions,” said Peabody.

“Be preventative, be safe, and enjoy the holiday,” he said.

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The following information is provided courtesy of the United States Lifesaving Association, in partnership with [NOAA's National Weather Service](#):



Learn how to swim!

- Never swim alone.
- Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out!
- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard protected beach.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards and other public safety personnel.
- If caught in a rip current, remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are unable to swim out of the rip current, float or calmly tread water. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.
- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1 . Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. **Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.**

For more information on rip currents go to: www.usla.org/ripcurrents