

Be River Safe

Swimming in Rivers

Fact Sheet

SWIMMING IN RIVERS

On a warm sunny day a river swimming hole looks like a great place for a swim. Swimming in rivers is fun but it can be dangerous.

The strength of river current or force of water in a river

Many people do not understand the force of water in a river. If you swim out of a swimming hole into the river current you can be swept down the river by the force of the water. You could be pulled underwater by the force of the current or pushed against an obstacle like a rock and be trapped and drown.

The current can be strong even if the river looks calm and the water is slow moving.

Swimming in a river is not like swimming in a pool or in the sea:

- river water is much colder than pool or sea water
- you do not float as well in river water as you do in sea water
- if you are in a river current and try to put your feet down your foot could become trapped under rocks
- if you are in a river current you can become trapped against obstacles and strainers or be swept into rapids, waterfalls or weirs
- if you are in a river current you will use a lot of energy to keep yourself afloat as you look to get out of the river at the first safe exit place.

Stop! Check it out before you leap in

Rivers change every day. Before you get into a swimming hole a good swimmer needs to check out the swimming hole. Check:

- the depth of the water. The water may be deeper or shallower than you think.
- what is beneath the water? There may be obstacles you can't see washed into the swimming hole. You could get trapped on a submerged log or rubbish dumped by people
- there is no strong current or risk of being swept into a fast-flowing part of the river.



Be River Safe ... *know your environment*

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A storm up-river may mean that a river hole is deeper than normal, or that water is flowing faster than normal. In summer the river depth may be too low for swimming, jumping or diving.

Good swimming spots

The best swimming spot is one that has:

- only a very weak current
- an easy place to get in and out of the water
- an even bottom that you can see
- a place you can get out of the water easily in case you get swept downstream.

A good swimming spot does NOT have:

- muddy water so you cannot see the bottom
- debris or submerged trees or tree roots in it
- boats or kayaks passing through it
- rapids or man-made features like bridges, wires, strainers or weirs downstream of it
- bridges either upstream or downstream of it as the bridges change the flow of the river.

Got a worry about the safety of the river swimming hole?

Be river safe ... if in doubt STAY OUT.

SUPERVISION

Drowning takes less than one minute and is very quiet.

Someone needs to have the role of supervising or watching out for those in the water.

An adult who is a good swimmer should supervise from in the water. Someone on the bank can provide additional supervision.

Supervision means actively watching those in the water. Supervisors should not be part of any activity other than supervision.

Young people should not supervise younger children. Rivers are just too dangerous an aquatic environment to give young people responsibility for younger family members.

For children under five and for learners and those who cannot swim, supervision means the supervisor is within sight and within reach of these individuals.

Support supervision in the water by using a pair 'buddy system' with two people or children watching out for each other.

Everyone in the water needs to take responsibility for safety and act appropriately.

For more information about supervision view the factsheet: SUPERVISION AT SWIMMING HOLES AND NEAR RIVERS.



Be River Safe ... *supervise children and learners*

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Don't swim alone

If you get into difficulty there is no-one there to help you or go and get someone to rescue you.

Let people know where you are.

Tell your family and friends where you are going. Remember your cell phone may not work down by the river, so tell them before you go. Change of plan? Then let someone know what's happening.

If someone is in trouble a safe rescue is a land-based rescue

If someone is in trouble and has been swept into the river current don't try to rescue them from in the water. It is unlikely you will reach the person in trouble and be able to help them. Once you are in the river current you may need to be rescued.

Never place yourself or others in danger when attempting a rescue.

A safe rescue is a land-based rescue.

- Follow the person in trouble down the river bank.
- Find a safe place where the person may be able to swim towards the bank and you can reach out over the river.
- Use an object like a kayak paddle or a tree branch to reach out over the river.
- Encourage the person in trouble to grab the branch or paddle and hang on.
- Pull them to the river bank and help them out.

If you cannot rescue the person safely from the bank:

- alert rescue services immediately
- encourage the person to turn on their back and float feet first down the river. Watch the **Be River Safe** DVD section **Survival Swimming** to learn how to survival swim. You could view the **Survival Swimming** section on the website and read the factsheet: SURVIVAL SWIMMING
- you may be able to throw the person a buoyant object like a bucket, chilly bin or ball that they can hang onto and use to keep themselves afloat.



Be River Safe ... *stop and think before you enter the water*