



Beach Safety and Survival Guide



Cape Lookout National Seashore is a wonderful remote place to visit. The beach stretches for miles without the usual manmade intrusions of buildings, lights and roads. Here you can visit the lighthouse area, go surf fishing or find a quiet stretch of beach to call your own for the day. Having an accident will spoil any visit. Please come prepared for your safety. Know your limits and understand the hazards that can be encountered.

Sun and Heat

Sunburn

Nothing can ruin a visit faster than becoming sunburned. Always use a good sunblock and reapply it often. Wear a brimmed hat that shades your nose, ears and back of the neck. Be especially careful on cloudy days, the clouds give many people a false sense of security.



Heat Exhaustion/Heat Stroke

During the summer months, the lack of shade on the beach combines with the humidity and high temperatures along the coast to create a very hostile environment. Bring plenty of drinking water with you and drink it throughout the day to prevent dehydration. Avoid the noontime sun and heat if at all possible. Heat illnesses can be extremely serious.

Insects, Poisonous Animals & Plants

Biting Insects

Mosquitoes, green head flies, sand gnats, chiggers and ticks can be problems from May through October. Bring an ample supply of repellent.

Jellyfish

Most jellyfish found near our beaches are harmless to humans. The stinger cells in a jellyfish's tentacles are designed for use against small fish and other prey, most people never feel the effects. Those who are allergic to bee or ant stings need to exercise some caution.



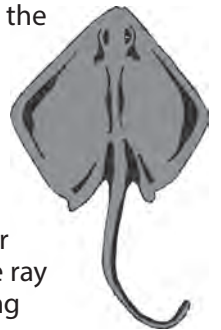
On rare occasions, the winds bring in the Portuguese Man-o-war. The sting of this jellyfish is extremely painful and potentially dangerous. If these are in the area, those who are allergic to bee or ant stings need to be extremely careful.



If stung by a jellyfish, carefully remove any tentacles on your skin by using sand, clothing, towels, seaweed or other available materials. As long as the tentacles remain on the skin, they will continue to sting. If swelling and pain persist, seek medical attention.

Stingrays

The stingray is just one of the species of skates and rays that inhabit the coastal waters. Its name comes from a sharp spine located at the base of its tail. This spine is used defensively and can inflict an extremely painful wound. Most injuries occur when a person steps on the ray either while wading or trying to recover a fishhook. If you are injured by a stingray, wash and clean the wound. If possible, soak the area in water as hot as can be tolerated for 30-90 minutes. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.



Poison Ivy

Poison ivy at the beach? Yes, this shade loving creeping vine is found in some sheltered areas of the island. If you go into the maritime forest on Shackleford Banks or the stands of pine trees near the lighthouse, be alert for this vine. Remember "leaflets three, leave it be."



Swimming Safety

There are no lifeguarded beaches within the seashore. All swimming is at your own risk. Never swim alone! Please watch your children in and near the water at all times. Be alert for strong currents or other natural conditions that may pose a problem for you or your family in the water.

Before going in the water, spend a few moments watching the waves. Wave patterns are good indicators of the presence of currents, sand bars and deep water troughs. Know what to expect before you go in.

Watch for the change of the tide - near shore currents can be stronger at different tide heights. Areas that were easy to reach at low tide may be unsafe at high tide.

Docks

For your safety do not jump or dive from the docks at any tide height. The water may be shallower than you think. Barnacles attached to the dock pilings can cut your hands and feet.

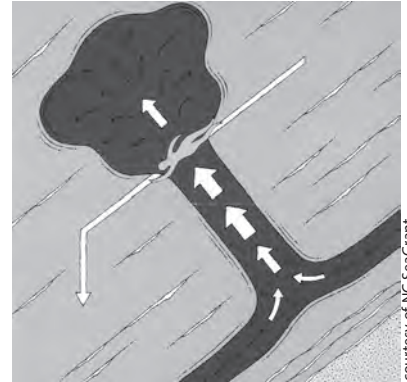
Be alert for boats coming in to anchor, they may not see you in the water.

Uneven Bottom

Please watch your footing when wading. Sudden changes in depth can occur even in the sound.

Rip Currents

Rip currents, commonly called rip tides and erroneously called undertows, are strong, narrow, river-like currents that are moving away from the shore. If you are caught in a rip current - do not panic. The current will not pull you under, but it will pull you out into deeper water. The best way to escape is to wade or swim parallel to the beach until you are out of the current. Then, when free, wade or swim back towards shore at an angle from the current. Do not attempt to swim directly against the current as you will only exhaust yourself.



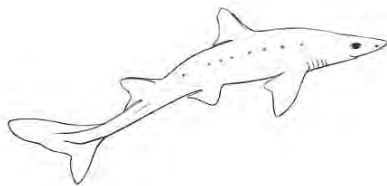
Certain weather conditions can make these currents stronger and more dangerous. Weak swimmers and children are advised to stay out of the ocean when there is an increased threat of rip currents, and even strong swimmers should stay out of the ocean on dangerous days.

Sharks

"Are there sharks in the water?" is a question that is often heard during the summer. The answer is "Yes." Eighteen shark species are found in the shallow waters near shore and in the sounds.

The next most often asked question is "Will the sharks attack me?" The answer is "Unlikely." It is a very rare occurrence for a shark to bite a swimmer anywhere along the coast of the United States.

Most people can swim in the ocean their entire lives without ever seeing a shark.



How to avoid meeting a shark

- Always swim in a group.
- Stay close to shore.
- Don't go swimming at night, dawn or dusk when sharks are more likely to be feeding.
- Use caution in areas where fish concentrate such as near inlets, steep drop-offs, or the area between sandbars. These are favorite hangouts for sharks!
- Get out of the water if you see schools of fish near shore which are leaping out of the water. This generally means that a large fish or shark is feeding in the area.
- Leave your jewelry at home. Reflective jewelry such as rings and watches could attract the attention of fish and sharks.