

# RACE YOU TO THE WATER

Swimming is the number one recreational activity in Texas, which is not surprising considering our access to swimming pools, beaches, lakes, bayous and rivers. It also accounts for nearly half of the water related deaths in the state each year.

There are some precautions that apply in any water. The most important should be obvious, but bear repeating: If water covers your nose and mouth, and you are unable to surface to breathe air, you will suffocate. Suffocation by water is known as drowning.

Your best insurance against drowning is learning to swim. If you can't master the complete technique, at least learn to tread water so you can yell or wave your arms for attention when you find yourself in difficulty.

Never swim alone. Even the best swimmers occasionally need help. If you get a leg cramp or find yourself in some kind of difficulty, you will be glad there is someone around.

Know the body of water before you go swimming. You may be an expert in a swimming pool, yet could find yourself in a potentially drowning situation in the surf when confronted with rip currents, sand bars and deep holes.

When possible, swim where trained lifeguards are on duty. Swimming from unguarded beaches is not always dangerous; it only means you are more responsible for your own actions.

Don't overexert yourself. Swimming when you're tired is asking for trouble.

Don't overestimate your swimming ability.

Also keep in mind that distances on water are deceiving; the other side of the cove is farther away than it looks.

Don't rely on inflatables. Inner tubes, plastic air mattresses and that puffed-up replica of Jaws may have a place, but it certainly isn't deep water. Too many times the unexpected happens — the inflatable springs a leak, you lose your balance or someone accidentally tips you over. Whatever the cause, the result is the same — you suddenly find yourself in water over your head with the inflatable out of reach. For a non-swimmer, this may prove fatal.

Don't dive into unknown waters. Each year swimmers dive into water that is too shallow, or they hit underwater objects that either break their necks or knock them unconscious. The depth of the water must be equal to the distance of your dive, otherwise you are taking an unnecessary risk.

A few good rules to follow anywhere along the beach include:

Do not swim in water more than waist deep; stay in even shallower water if you can't swim.

Do not swim if you're tired, sick, or if you've been using alcohol or drugs.

Do not swim in boating areas.

Do not swim during thunderstorms or in strong wind.

Stay at least 100 feet away from rock jetties, groins and piers. Strong currents form there, and they cut deep holes in the bottom.

Be alert for sea animals that may stick, bite, sting, cut or even shock you. Get out of the water if you encounter one and seek immediate medical attention if you are injured.

For more information, contact:

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