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# Longfellow's Rules for Safe Swimming

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## Learn to Swim

The best thing you can do to stay safe in, on and around water is to know your limits and learn how to swim. Formal swim lessons play a key role in keeping children safe around water. Swim lessons can't teach everything in one session. Children must work through all the levels of a swim program to become good swimmers.

The American Red Cross Learn-to-Swim program has six levels that help swimmers of any age and ability develop their swimming and water safety skills. To enroll in a swimming course, go to [redcross.org](http://redcross.org).

## Swimming Rules

- Always swim with a buddy; never swim alone.
- Read and obey all rules and posted signs.
- Swim in areas that are supervised by a lifeguard.
- If you are an inexperienced swimmer, take extra care when around the water, such as wearing a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket.
- Watch out for the “dangerous too’s”—too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.
- Follow water safety rules set by parents; for example, inexperienced swimmers should stay in water less than chest deep.
- Ask permission from parents before you swim.
- Know the water environment you are in and its possible hazards.
- Know where the deep and shallow areas are, whether there are currents and where to enter and exit the water.
- Know how to prevent, recognize and respond to emergencies.
- Use a feetfirst entry when entering the water.
- Enter headfirst only when the area is clearly marked for diving and has no obstructions.
- Stay away from pool drains! If a pool drain is not secured properly, suction can pull hair, clothing, jewelry or a body part into the drain or trap a person.

## Rules for Waterparks

- Be sure the area is well supervised by lifeguards before you or others in your group enter the water.
- Read all posted signs. Follow the rules and directions given by lifeguards. Ask questions if you are not sure about a correct procedure.
- When you go from one attraction to another, note that the water depth may be different and that the attraction may be used in a different way.

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- Be aware that some attractions have moving water, such as wave pools, and require swimming skills to be safe.
- Before you start down a water slide, get into the correct position. Follow the posted rules or the directions the lifeguard gives you.
- Some facilities provide life jackets at no charge. If you cannot swim, wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket.

## Rules for the Beach

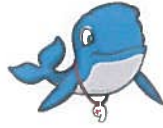
- Stay within the designated swimming area and near a lifeguard.
- Check the surf conditions before you enter the water. Look to see if a warning flag is up or check with a lifeguard for water conditions, beach conditions or any potential hazards, especially rip currents.
- Stay away from piers, pilings and jetties when in the water.
- Keep a lookout for aquatic life. Water plants and animals may be dangerous. Before going into any ocean, find out what local marine life may be dangerous, how to avoid it and how to care for any injuries.
- Never dive headfirst into breaking waves. Many swimmers have suffered head, neck and back injuries while diving into waves, not realizing that the water depth was too shallow for a dive.
- Watch for longshore currents and rip currents. Longshore currents move parallel to the shore. If you are caught in a longshore current, try to swim toward shore while moving along with the current. Rip currents move straight out to sea beyond the breaking waves. If you are caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current. Once you are free, turn and swim toward shore.

## Rules for Lakes and Rivers

- Select a supervised area. A trained lifeguard who can help in an emergency is the best safety factor. Even good swimmers can have an unexpected medical emergency in the water.
- Inexperienced swimmers and young children should wear life jackets.
- Children or inexperienced swimmers should avoid areas where moving water is present.
- Select an area that is clean and well maintained. A clean bathhouse, clean restrooms and a litter-free environment show the management's concern for your health and safety. Water pollution can cause health problems for swimmers.
- Avoid all water activities above and below a dam.
- Avoid possible hazards such as murky water, hidden underwater objects, currents, waves, unexpected drop-offs and aquatic plant life.
- Use a feetfirst entry when entering the water.
- Enter headfirst only when the area is marked clearly for diving.
- Be sure rafts and piers are in good condition, with no loose boards or exposed nails.

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- Never swim under a raft or pier. Always look before jumping off a pier or raft to be sure no one is in the way.
- Make sure you always have enough energy to swim back to shore.
- Water that appears calm on the surface may have a current below the surface. Do not underestimate the power of an unseen current. If you are caught in a current and being swept away, roll over onto your back and go downstream feetfirst to avoid hitting your head. When you are out of the strongest part of the current, swim straight towards shore.
- A hydraulic is a strong force created by water flowing downward over an object, then reversing its flow. The reverse flow of the water can trap and hold a person under. If you are caught in a hydraulic, do not fight it but swim to the bottom and then swim out of the current to reach the surface.

