Chris Brewster, United States Lifesaving Association

A break in the incoming wave pattern is one sign of a rip current.

Facts about rip currents

- Rip current speeds vary. Average speeds are 1-2 feet per second, but they have been measured as fast as 8 feet per second—faster than an Olympic swimmer!
- Rip currents can be very narrow or more than 50 yards wide.
- Sometimes rip currents end just beyond the line of breaking waves; however, they may continue to pull hundreds of yards offshore.
- Rip currents do not pull people under the water—they pull people away from shore.
- Rip currents are not "undertow" or "riptides." These improper terms should not be used to describe them.

Safety tips

- Know how to swim.
- Never swim alone.
- For maximum safety, swim near a lifeguard.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards.
- Be cautious at all times.
- If in doubt, don't go out!

United States Lifesaving Association statistics indicate that the chance of death by drowning at a beach protected by lifeguards is 1 in 18 million.

Where can I get more information about rip currents?

- Before you leave for the beach, check the latest National Weather Service forecast for local beach conditions. Many offices issue a Surf Zone Forecast.
- When you arrive at the beach, ask on-duty lifeguards about rip currents and any other hazards that may be present.
- More information about rip currents can be found at the following web sites:

www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov
www.usla.org

NOAA's National Weather Service, National Sea Grant College Program, and the United States Lifesaving Association are working to educate the public on the dangers of rip currents.

NOAA PA 200455

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Rip currents account for 80% of rescues performed by surf beach lifeguards.

What are rip currents?

- Rip currents are channelized currents of water flowing away from shore at surf beaches.
- Rip currents typically form at breaks in sandbars, and also near structures such as jetties and piers.
- Rip currents are quite common and can be found on many surf beaches every day, including Great Lakes beaches.

Why are rip currents dangerous?

- Rip currents pull people away from shore.
- Rip current speeds can vary from moment to moment and can quickly increase to become dangerous to anyone entering the surf.
- Rip currents can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

Dr. Tom Herrington, Stevens Institute of Technology

Rip currents often form near coastal structures.

Lifeguard Captain Nick Steers, County of Los Angeles Fire Department

Rip currents often generate a plume of sediment moving away from shore.

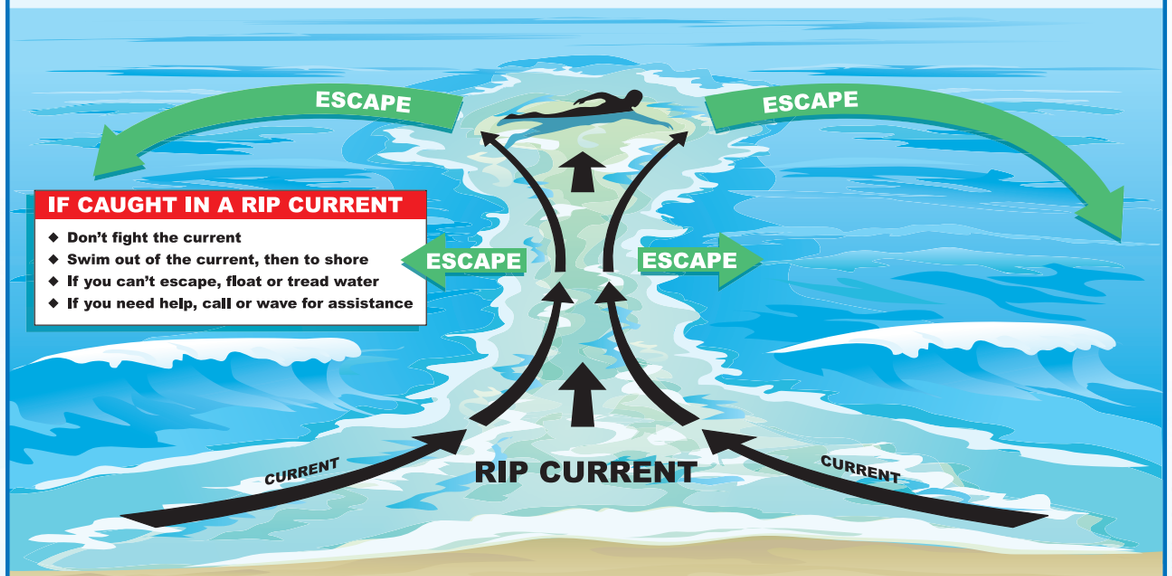
What are some clues that a rip current may be present?

- A channel of churning, choppy water.
- A difference in water color.
- A line of foam, seaweed or debris moving seaward.
- A break in the incoming wave pattern.

What if I'm caught in a rip current?

- Stay calm.
- Don't fight the current.
- Escape the current by swimming in a direction following the shoreline. When free of the current, swim at an angle—away from the current—toward shore.
- If you are unable to escape by swimming, float or tread water. When the current weakens, swim at an angle away from the current toward shore.
- If at any time you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, call or wave for help.

RIP CURRENTS Break the Grip of the Rip!



Rip currents are powerful currents of water moving away from shore. They can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

Dave Brenner, Michigan Sea Grant

How do I help someone else?

Don't become a victim while trying to help someone else!
Many people have died in efforts to rescue rip current victims.

- Get help from a lifeguard.
- If a lifeguard is not present, yell instructions on how to escape.
- If possible, throw the rip current victim something that floats.
- Call 9-1-1 for further assistance.

Courtesy of Discovery Communications

A lifeguard rescues a swimmer caught in a rip current.

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