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Stay Safe at the Beach this Summer



Now that summer is here, many of us will spend some time enjoying the beach. Whether planning to go for a swim in the ocean or just enjoy being in the sun on the sand, it's important to do so safely. The Livingston Health Department offers some tips to help make sure you and your family have a safe day at the beach.

Stay near a lifeguard. Swimming in an area where there is a lifeguard present is much safer than swimming without a lifeguard. Lifeguards can also warn you of any hazards on the beach or in the ocean. If you are going to swim, be where a lifeguard can see you in the event you need help.

Don't swim alone. Make sure there is someone else with you in case you need help, even if there are lifeguards on duty. Keep in mind, swimming in the ocean is different from swimming in a pool, since the ocean currents can make swimming more challenging.

Obey any signs or flags. Signs and flags at the beach are there to warn you of potential dangers. Be sure to read and follow any signs. If you are unsure of the reason for any flags or signs, check with a lifeguard.

Wear sunscreen. Protect your skin from the sun's harmful rays, which can cause sunburn, skin damage, and skin cancer. Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or more. Reapply sunscreen regularly based on the directions on the sunscreen – typically about every two hours, or more often if you have been in the water or are sweating excessively.

Stay well hydrated. Being out in the sun and heat can quickly lead to dehydration if you aren't consuming enough fluids. Alcohol and caffeine are diuretics and can

contribute to dehydration and heat exhaustion. It's important to drink plenty of non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated beverages, and lots of water.

Be aware of the water's depth. Sand bars and sudden drop-offs are common in the ocean, meaning that the depth of the water can change suddenly. Be careful of changes in the depth of the water, especially if you are swimming with children.

Don't dive in. Always enter unknown water feet first to prevent head and neck injuries, and never jump in. At the beach, water depths can vary greatly based on sand bars, drop-offs and tides. Water that is safe for diving should be at least 9 feet deep and should be indicated as safe for diving. If you don't know the depth of the water, check it beforehand and also check for any obstructions.

Consider wearing water shoes. Water shoes can protect you from rocks, shells, the hot sand, and other debris that can hurt your feet. They are also convenient, since you can wear them on land, on the sand and in the water, and they dry quickly.

Watch for rip currents. If you are being rapidly pulled away from the shore, you may be caught in a rip current. Rip currents typically flow at least 1 - 2 feet per second, which is much faster than any swimmer. That's why trying to swim against the current will only result in you being exhausted and pulled even farther away from the shore. If you find yourself caught in a rip current, try to stay calm and keep your head above water, and swim parallel to the shore until you are no longer in the rip current and are able to swim towards the shore. Call for help if you are struggling to get out of a rip current.

Wear a life jacket. When preparing to go boating, or to take part in watersports or any water activity, all involved should wear a securely fastened life jacket. Life jackets should be US Coast Guard approved, in good condition, and fit appropriately. In addition, wearing a life jacket when swimming helps keep children safe in the water, and those who are not strong swimmers can be safer in the water if they are wearing a life jacket. Different states have different laws that require life jackets to be worn in certain situations; visit nj.gov to make sure you are following New Jersey State laws.

Be mindful of marine life. While sharks are rare, they seem to get a lot of attention; however, they are just a small part of the ocean's marine life. Be on the lookout for marine life such as sand crabs, clams, and jellyfish. It's important to note that even jellyfish that are no longer alive can still sting. Typically, sting treatment involves plucking out the tentacles and then soaking the area in hot - but not scalding - water, followed by hydrocortisone application. If you get stung, you may want to notify a lifeguard who can help you with treating the sting.