

Water safety

Play it safe by the water

When enjoying Victoria's wonderful coastline, lakes, river systems, public and home swimming pools, remember the following:

Know your environment

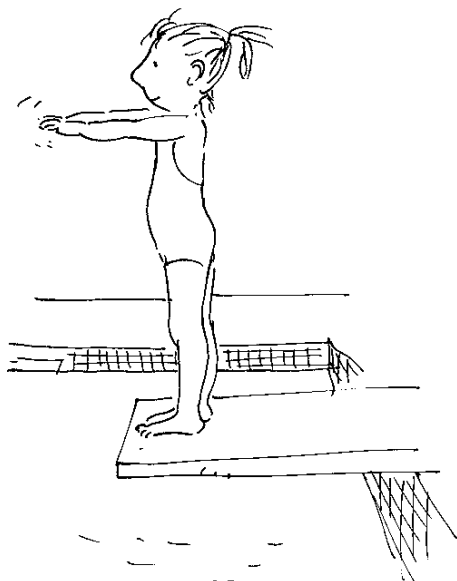
There are different safety rules for beaches, rivers, lakes and public or private swimming pools. Be aware of the local water environment and weather conditions before entering the water.

Behave safely

Obey all water safety signs, don't drink alcohol while in charge of a boat and make sure someone is looking out for you.

Learn to swim

Being able to swim is an essential water safety skill. Everybody, especially school-age children, should be taught to swim and how to stay



afloat. If you get into trouble in the water, thrown from a boat or swept out to sea, there are a number of basic skills to help you survive, such as staying calm, remaining with your boat or using a buoyant object to stay afloat. Being able to swim also opens up sport, leisure and great recreational experiences.

Drowning facts

From 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008, 41 people lost their lives as a result of drowning/immersion incidents in Victoria. This is an increase of 4 drowning deaths compared to the previous year.

- Of those who drowned, 31 (76%) were males and 10 (24%) females. Males are three times more likely to drown than females.
- Similar to previous years, the majority of drowning deaths in 2007/08 occurred in summer, 13 (32%). The proportion of drowning deaths occurring in autumn and winter was slightly higher this year compared to the previous ten years (1997–2007).
- This year saw a decrease in drowning deaths in both inland waterways and the home environment compared to the previous 10 years.

At the beach – always swim between the red and yellow flags and never swim alone

Any beach can be dangerous. Beach-goers should be careful and always swim between the red and yellow flags, which indicate that the beach is patrolled by lifesavers.

When swimming between the red and yellow flags, always look back to the beach to check that you are still between the flags. If you choose to swim outside these flags, you could be moving into a more dangerous location.

What if the beach is not patrolled?

- As beaches are not patrolled every day of the year, please remember to:
- Never swim alone
- Check it's ok to swim
- Read and obey the water safety signs.

Rips

A rip is a strong water current running out to sea from a beach. Rips can easily sweep swimmers out to sea from shallow water, sometimes several hundred metres offshore.

Rips occur at all beach locations, including bays. Common signs of a rip are:

- Murky brown water caused by sand and seaweed being stirred up off the sea bed
- Foam on the surface extending beyond the break
- Waves breaking on both sides of the rip but not inside the rip (the rip may seem calm and inviting)
- Water that appears dark, indicating deeper water
- Debris floating out to sea.

If you are caught in a rip when at a beach patrolled by lifesavers, obey the three **Rs**:

Relax Stay calm and float with the current; swim across it, not against it.

Raise Raise an arm to signal for help.

Rescue Float and wait for assistance.

Surfing and bodyboarding

At a patrolled beach all surfers must surf



outside the blue flags. These flags are sometimes used to create a buffer zone between the swimming area (between the red and yellow flags) and the board-riding areas. No surfboards are allowed between the blue flags. Many of the best surf spots are found at beaches that are not patrolled, but if you are going to surf there, never surf alone! Surfers must take responsibility for their own and others' safety. Always let someone know where you are going.

Surfing and bodyboarding safety tips

- Always surf or bodyboard with a friend.
- Assess the conditions thoroughly prior to entering the surf.
- Continue to assess the conditions as they can suddenly change.
- When surfing or bodyboarding use the correct equipment – leg rope and nose guard for surfing, wrist strap and fins for bodyboarding.
- If you get into trouble, stay on your surfboard or bodyboard; it will keep you afloat.
- If you are caught in a rip, stay calm, stay with your board and paddle parallel to the beach, then catch a broken wave back to shore.
- Be aware of other people in the water and don't surf or bodyboard too close to swimmers.
- Don't surf or bodyboard when waves are dumping (these waves break with great force and can easily throw you to the bottom).

Inland waters – check it's ok to swim

Many people drown in Victoria's rivers, lakes and dams or are paralysed after diving into shallow water. The best way to check it's ok to swim is to ask someone who knows the area, such as a shopkeeper, caravan park owner or park ranger.

Lake safety

- Lakes may look calm but are often very dangerous. Strong winds can create



choppy conditions making it dangerous for swimming and boating.

- Strong currents are likely wherever a river enters a lake, and the lake bed may be soft and uneven where silt has been deposited.
- Cold water in lakes can be lethal. It is often much colder beneath the surface than you think.
- Suddenly submerging into cold water can cause distress, shock and lack of mobility. If you feel cold, get out of the water immediately.

River safety

- Never swim in fast-flowing water. Check the speed first by throwing in a twig to see how fast it travels.
- If you are caught in a current, float on your back and travel downstream, feet first, to protect your head from impact with any objects.
- Beware of submerged objects. Trees, branches, rocks and discarded rubbish can be very dangerous.
- Be careful not to stand near the edge of overhanging river banks, which can crumble away.
- Conditions can change rapidly due to heavy

rainfall or the release of water from storage areas. Remember that what is safe in the morning can be dangerous by the afternoon.

- Watch out for soft or uneven river beds, which can cause difficulties for waders or swimmers.

Pools – never take your eyes off

Never take your eyes off children in and around the pool. Active supervision means that the child is consistently watched by an adult within arms reach.

Pool safety tips

- Supervision means constant visual contact, not the occasional glance.
- If you leave the pool or water area, even for a moment, take the children with you.
- A swimming pool fence is not a substitute for supervision.
- Display a resuscitation chart on your pool fence.
- Familiarise children with water by taking them to lessons at the local pool.
- Empty paddling pools when they are not in use.

- Empty baths, basins, sinks, buckets and troughs, immediately after use.

Public pool safety

Even in a supervised public pool, never take your eyes off children swimming. Toddlers, in particular, have a natural attraction to water and their sense of danger and fear is underdeveloped. Special care should be taken to ensure that you **always watch them** around water. Here are some simple safety steps to follow:

- Active supervision means constant visual contact, not the occasional glance, even at a public pool. You should be within arms reach.
- A lifeguard is no substitute for parental supervision.
- Obey the lifeguard's directions.
- Follow pool rules.
- Be aware of other people in the water, particularly when it is crowded.
- Watch out for young children.
- Do not go out of your depth unless you are a good swimmer.

Home pool safety

Safety barriers – A legal requirement

It is law that swimming pools or spas on private residential properties in Victoria provide safety barriers to restrict access to the pool or spa.

Every private swimming pool or spa capable



of containing a depth of water exceeding 300mm must have a childproof safety barrier. A building permit is also required prior to installing the barrier.

Safety barriers, even when provided, are no substitute for adult supervision of toddlers and children who are playing in or near swimming pools or spas. Barriers are required for:

- Inground pools
- Jacuzzis
- Aboveground pools
- Hot tubs
- Indoor swimming pools
- Spas
- Bathing and wading pools.

To ensure that your safety barrier remains effective:

- Fit and maintain correct safety measures to gates, doors and windows (e.g. self-closing, self-latching devices, flyscreens).
- Make sure you remove any items such as chairs, boxes, pool pumps that could be used to climb the barrier to access the pool.

For further information, contact your local council or the Building Commission.

T (03) 9285 6400 or visit

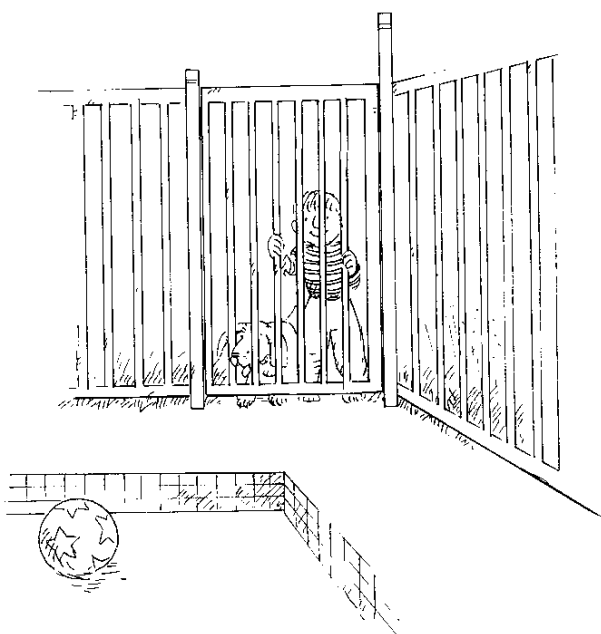
W www.buildingcommission.com.au.

Water survival - remain calm to survive

What will I do if I accidentally end up in the water?

If you fall overboard, or are swept out to sea, or are caught in a river current, stay calm. You can stay afloat for a long time, even if you are exhausted. Some things to remember.

- Use any available buoyant object to assist flotation or stay with your boat.
- Remain as still as possible to conserve energy and reduce heat loss.
- If you must swim, use slow, relaxed strokes.
- Breathe in a regular and controlled manner.
- To attract attention, float on your back and raise one arm; waving both arms makes it very difficult to keep your head above water.



How do I avoid spinal injuries?

To avoid spinal injuries:

- Never dive into unknown water; always check that it's ok to swim.
- Check the depth and always check for submerged objects.

People who seem bewildered and experience lack of movement, muscle weakness, numbness or tingling are likely to have suffered spinal injury. The first priority is to ensure that the airway is clear. It is best not to try to move the victim but to seek expert help.

Boating safety

Before heading out ensure that your safety equipment is on board and easily accessible. Make a habit of running a regular maintenance check on your boat.

When do I need to wear a life jacket? (PFD)

- PFDs must be worn at all times* on:
 - Powerboats up to and including 4.8m
 - Off the beach yachts and paddle craft.
- PFDs must be worn at times of heightened risk* on:
- Powerboats greater than 4.8m up to 12m
 - All yachts.

What is heightened risk?

Heightened risk includes:

- At night
 - Boating alone
 - Crossing bars
 - High risk of capsize or swamping
 - During a gale, storm, severe thunderstorm or severe weather warning issued by BoM
 - Yachts with no safety barriers, lifelines, safety harnesses or jacklines in use.
- * When in an open area of a vessel which is underway.

Inland boating safety tips

Seek up-to-date local knowledge, particularly if you are going boating, as conditions of rivers and lakes may be affected by low water levels.

Take extreme caution and operate your vessel at a safe speed.

Tree stumps and other submerged objects can present a hazard to the safe operation of boats – particularly those operating at speed. It is the responsibility of the boat operator to operate at a safe speed.

For more information:

W www.marinesafety.vic.gov.au

T Marine Safety Victoria on 1800 223 022.

How to get involved in aquatic activities and useful contacts

With our love of water and easy access to a variety of water environments, why not get involved in an activity offered from the following organisation:

Aquatics & Recreation Victoria Inc

T (03) 8843 2000

W www.aquarecvic.org.au

E info@acquarecvic.org.au

- Participate in VICSWIM, a fun and educational swimming and water safety holiday program conducted at pools, beaches, lakes and rivers across Victoria.
- Become a teacher of swimming and water safety (AUSTSWIM).

Marine Safety Victoria

T 1800 223 022

W www.marinesafety.vic.gov.au

Find out about boat licensing and other boating safety.

Life Saving Victoria

T (03) 9676 6900

W www.lifesavingvictoria.com.au

E mail@lifesavingvictoria.com.au

- Join a lifesaving club
- Do your lifesaving Bronze Medallion
- Learn CPR and First Aid
- Run water safety education programs at your local school.

Become a

- Professional beach lifeguard
- Volunteer lifesaver
- Professional pool lifeguard
- Teacher of swimming and water safety (AUSTSWIM)
- Nipper (junior lifesaver).

Surfing Victoria

T (03) 5261 2907

W www.surfingaustralia.com

E info@surfingvic.com

- Learn to surf
- Join a board riders' club
- Become a level 1 Accredited Surf Coach.

Swimming Victoria

T (03) 9686 5222

W www.swimmingvictoria.org.au

E sv.admin@vic.swimming.org.au

- Join a swimming club
- Become a teacher of swimming and water safety (AUSTSWIM)
- Become a swimming coach (NCAS accredited)

Swim School Owners Association of Australia (Victoria Branch)

T (03) 8662 5491

Yachting Victoria or your local yacht club

T (03) 9597 0066

W www.yachtingvictoria.com.au

E sailing@yachtingvictoria.com.au

- Join a sailing club and learn to sail.
- Contact your local aquatic centre or swim school for other aquatic activities, such as swimming and water safety programs, water polo, diving and synchronised swimming.

For further water safety information:

Play it Safe by the Water

Department of Justice

W www.watersafety.vic.gov.au