Beach Lifeguard
Manual

About this manual

The primary aim of the *Beach Lifeguard Manual* is to help save lives by providing a resource that contains essential skills, knowledge and guidance for lifeguards and lifesavers.

The resource is designed for organisations based in low-resource areas with limited access to equipment.

This manual has been designed as a guidance document and can be adapted to suit the local environment.

This manual is reviewed every 3 years.

Please send any comments and feedback to: international@rnli.org.uk

Please refer to:

https://rnli.org/what-we-do/international/international-resources

for the latest version of this handbook.

December 2023

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Drowning is a major but under-recognised public health problem in the developing world. It is a leading cause of death in many countries.

New and developing lifesaving organisations can struggle to introduce effective coastal drowning prevention strategies due to limited training and resources.

Together, the International Drowning Research Centre – Bangladesh (IDRC-B) and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) have developed a beach lifeguard course, specifically designed for use in areas where specialist equipment and facilities are unavailable.

Organisations and individuals are free to copy parts of the manual for teaching and learning purposes. We hope that by sharing knowledge and understanding of the beach environment and lifesaving skills we can help save more lives from drowning worldwide.

The IDRC-B is a leading research organisation focused on reducing drowning by developing appropriate and fit-for-purpose solutions.

The RNLI is a charity that saves lives at sea by operating a lifeboat and lifeguard service around the UK and Republic of Ireland. It trains more than 1,000 lifeguards each year, who patrol more than 220 beaches.

Unit 1: The drowning problem

Learning outcomes

1.1   Know what drowning is.

1.2   Understand why people drown.

1.3   Know who is at risk of drowning.

1.1 What is drowning?

For any human being to stay alive the following three things are needed:

🟢 **Oxygen (Air)**

If a casualty is lacking oxygen a rescuer needs to think about their breathing.

🔴 **Blood**

If a casualty is bleeding it needs to be controlled.

🔵 **Pump (Heart)**

If a casualty's pump (heart) stops, the rescuer may need to pump for them.

Without one of these, a person will not survive.

The definition of drowning, adopted from the World Congress on Drowning (2002) is: 'The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid.'

Drowning occurs when a person is unable to breathe oxygen because their airways are under water.

1.2 Why people drown

The reasons people drown can be shown by the drowning chain. Each link in the chain can result in drowning, or can lead to the next link.
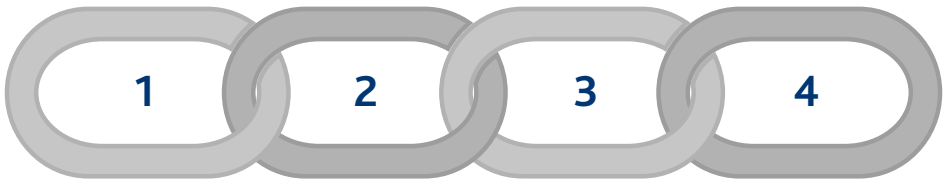
	1. Lack of knowledge, disregard for or misunderstanding of the hazard	2. Uninformed or unrestricted access to the hazard	3. Lack of supervision or surveillance	4. Inability to cope once in difficulty
Cause	• Unable to identify the dangers. • Not understanding the dangers and how they could cause harm.	• People are able to use dangerous areas of water, such as areas with strong currents.	• Swimming in areas where there is no one to provide rescue.	• Being unable to swim to safety.
Role of the lifeguard	• To spot the dangers on the beach. • To tell people what the dangers are. • To offer advice about the dangers in and around the beach.	• To provide a safe area of water for people to use and advise against swimming in dangerous areas. • To work with local authorities to restrict access to dangerous areas.	• To provide safety supervision.	• To provide a rescue service for people who get into difficulty.

To prevent a person from drowning, all links in the drowning chain should be considered. It is important to break the chain as soon as possible before a rescue is needed.

1.3 People at risk of drowning

Anybody can drown but certain people may be at a higher risk.

High-risk groups may include:

- children
- fishermen
- visitors
- non-swimmers
- elderly people
- drunk people.

As a lifeguard it is important for us to know that anyone can drown or get into difficulty in the water.

Unit 2: The lifeguard

Learning outcomes

2.1   Know what a lifeguard is.

2.2   Understand the role of a lifeguard.

2.3   Understand what makes a good lifeguard.

2.4   Understand the lifeguard uniform and personal equipment.

2.5   Understand how a lifeguard can be affected by the weather.

2.6   Understand the importance of personal fitness.
      Be able to demonstrate the required level of fitness.

2.1 What is a lifeguard?

A lifeguard is a person who is responsible for maintaining the safety of people using the beach and the water.

Lifeguards take responsibility for a defined area or activity to make sure that it is safe to use.

2.2 What does a lifeguard do?

It is the duty of the lifeguard to:

- prevent incidents from occurring
- respond to developing incidents
- respond to emergency incidents by providing rescue and emergency care skills.

Conducting a rescue is dangerous for both the casualty and the lifeguard. The drowning chain (see page 4) highlights the steps required to reduce the chance of a person getting into difficulty in the water.

Community education

In addition to providing supervision and rescue, lifeguards will also help to educate people about the dangers of the water while at the beach.

It is important that beach users are aware of:

- dangers on the beach
- the meaning of flags and information signs
- the role of a lifeguard
- where it is safe to swim or surf.

Community education begins by targeting those most at risk of drowning.

These might be local people, or people travelling to the beach from another area.

There are many different ways to communicate with beach users. This may include school and community talks, media campaigns, posters, leaflets or simply talking with beach users.

Talking

Talk to people about the dangers on the beach and how they can keep themselves safe. This can be done on the beach, in a local school or at a community centre.

Posters

Posters are an easy way to communicate to a large number of people and they do not require many resources. Posters with pictures are also a good way of communicating with people who are unable to read.

Think about holding a poster competition in your local school.

Signs

Signs are an important way of telling people about the dangers on the beach when they arrive.

Warning signs direct people away from dangerous areas. Information signs tell people about local weather and surf conditions.

The media

Get the local newspaper, radio and television stations to broadcast your beach safety message to the public. This is a great way to reach a large audience.

2.3 What makes a good lifeguard?

A good lifeguard must be able to interact well with members of the public and other services to prevent incidents from happening.

Some key skills of a good lifeguard are:

- able to communicate well
- reliable and trustworthy
- observant – quick to notice things and respond
- knowing the local dangers
- good water skills and fitness levels
- training regularly.

2.4 Lifeguard uniform and personal equipment

A uniform makes a lifeguard more visible and easily identified by beach users and other lifeguards. It also makes the lifeguard service look professional.

The colours red and yellow are internationally accepted lifeguard colours. They are bright and can be seen over long distances.

It is recommended that T-shirts are yellow and shorts are red.

'LIFEGUARD' can be written on clothing and equipment for people who are unfamiliar with lifeguard colours. This also helps people who are colour-blind.
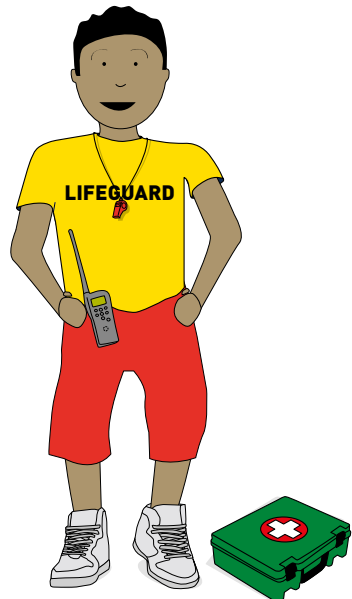
Lifeguard personal equipment

The following items are recommended for a lifeguard to have and use.

Whistle

A whistle is used to attract the attention of bathers and other lifeguards. There are a number of different types of whistle available. Try to make sure that a whistle used for lifeguard duty works well even when wet.

Footwear

Lifeguards may need footwear that can protect their feet from dangerous items on the beach, such as glass or sharp shells.

Personal first aid kit

It is good to carry a small first aid kit so you can help people and give first aid. A resuscitation mask can also be carried.

Communication

A hand-held radio or mobile phone can be used to communicate with other lifeguards in an emergency.

2.5 Lifeguard environment

It is important that the lifeguard is suitably protected from different weather conditions. To operate safely and effectively, it is important to protect yourself against these and not get too hot or too cold.

Sun

Always wear your lifeguard uniform when patrolling. If available, wear sunglasses and a hat. Apply sunscreen if needed.

Find some shade and try to stay in the shade at the hottest time of the day.

Stay cool and hydrated by drinking lots of water.

Give advice on sun safety to beach users.

Wind

It can be tiring working in windy conditions. It can also make communicating with others harder.

Rain

If it rains, seek shelter. Your body temperature will drop faster if you are wet.

Sea temperature

Sea temperatures vary seasonally and sometimes daily. The body will cool down rapidly in water.

Lightning

Electrical storms can be dangerous for lifeguards and beach users. Seek safe shelter and give safety advice to beach users.

Fog

Fog can quickly limit a lifeguard's visibility. If in the water, return to shore quickly and wait for it to clear. Advise beach users to exit the water.

Always look out for other beach users who may be at risk and give advice when necessary.

2.6 Lifeguard fitness

Maintaining a high level of fitness is essential to provide an effective lifeguard service.

Lifeguards must be able to respond quickly to an emergency, which can be physically demanding.

A good lifeguard must be able to:

- **run** – to an incident, and for further assistance.
- **swim** – to a casualty in difficulty in the water.
- **tread water** – to support a casualty in the water.
- **tow** – to bring the casualty back to shore.

Learning outcomes

3.1 Know the different types of beach.
Understand the hazards associated with the different types of beach.

3.2 Understand how the beach profile affects water depth.

3.3 Understand how wind can affect beach users.

3.4 Know the different types of waves.
Understand how different types of waves can affect the safety of beach users.

3.5 Know what rip currents are and how they are formed.
Know what a rip current looks like.
Understand how to escape from a rip current.
Understand how a lifeguard can use a rip current.

3.6 Understand how tides can affect beach users.

3.1 Types of beach

There are many different types of beach, each with their own unique hazards.

Lifeguard services should:

- identify all hazards on the beach
- understand how they could be dangerous to beach users
- develop plans to limit the danger
- ensure lifeguards have local knowledge.

Rocks

Rocks create dangerous entry and exit points to the water and may be slippery. Be aware of underwater rocks.

River mouth

Strong currents can occur where rivers meet the sea. Swimming is not recommended here.

Stones

Stony beaches often have a steep slope. These can be dangerous for swimmers and paddlers who are unaware of the change in water depth.

Sand

Sandy beaches are often very popular. These can be good places to patrol. However, sand does create a dynamic environment that can change quickly.

Beach locations

Harbour beaches

Motorised boats and other water activities are common here. The water can be very deep. Swimming is not recommended here.

Rural/remote beaches

Quiet or remote beaches can cause lifeguards problems if additional support is required. They may cover a large area.

Town/city beaches

These beaches can be very crowded. They can provide a large variety of incidents that lifeguards may have to respond to. Pollution can also be a hazard.

Inland beaches

Inland beaches can be popular with inland communities. They can have the same type of hazards as coastal beaches. These can also be remote.

3.2 Water depth

For weak and non-swimmers, a change in water depth is the most dangerous feature of a beach. Waves can cause the slope of a beach to change very quickly.

A lifeguard should be aware of the changing depth of water on the beach that they are working on. They should try to make sure that areas for swimming do not contain depth changes that could be a danger to weak and non-swimmers.

Shallow sloping

A shallow sloping beach is best for weak swimmers and small children.
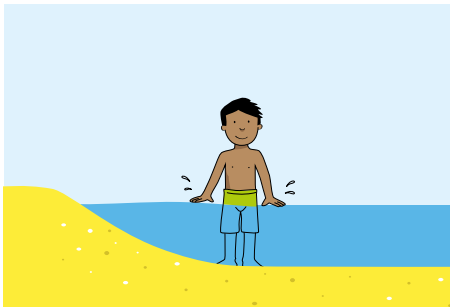
Steep sloping

A beach with a steep slope can be dangerous for weak and non-swimmers as they can easily slip into water out of their depth.

Children can also find themselves out of their depth very quickly due to the sudden drop-off.

Holes

Wave action may also create 'holes' in the sand close to shore. These are particularly dangerous for small children playing or bathing in shallow water.

3.3 Wind

The strength and direction of the wind are important to consider when assessing the safety of beach users. The size and formation of waves is strongly influenced by the wind.

Offshore winds

Wind that is blowing from the shore to the sea is known as an offshore wind. Offshore winds are particularly dangerous for people using inflatable equipment, such as rubber tyres, as they can be blown away from the shore easily.

Inflatables should not be used during a strong offshore wind.
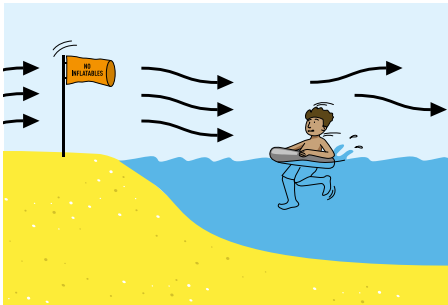
Onshore winds

Wind that is blowing from the sea to the shore is known as an onshore wind. Onshore winds break up the surface of the wave and create choppy surf conditions.

You can tell the direction of the wind easily by looking at the direction the flags are blowing.

3.4 Waves

Waves are formed by the wind. The size of the waves will depend on how long and hard the wind blows for. As waves move closer to shore into shallower water, they will break.

There are three main types of wave:

Spilling

Spilling waves occur when the top of the wave tumbles down the front of the wave. They usually form on a gently sloping beach.

Spilling waves are the safest to swim in.
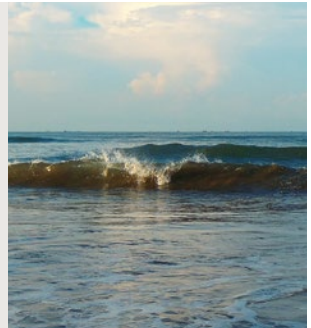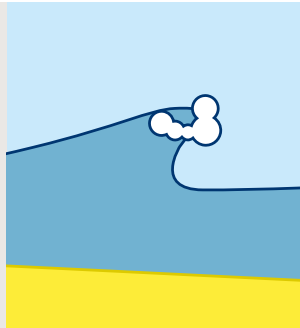
Plunging/dumping

Plunging or dumping waves occur when the top of the wave curls forward and collapses with great force. They usually form on a steeply sloping beach.

A person can be knocked over or injured by a plunging wave.
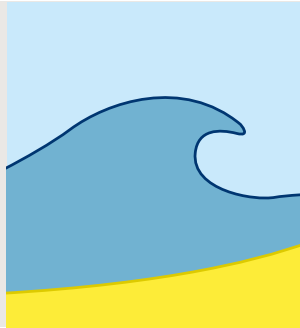
Surging

Surging waves never break as they approach the beach. They usually occur in deep water.

Surging waves can knock people off their feet and carry them back into deep water. For this reason they can be very dangerous, especially around rocks.
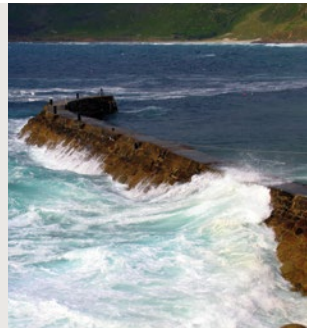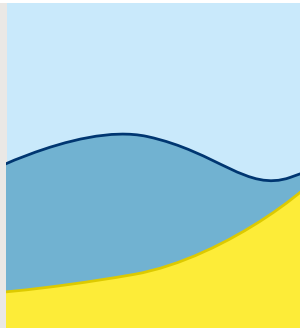
3.5 Rip currents

What is a rip current?

A rip is a current of water moving out to sea or parallel with the beach.

As waves break on the shore, the water being pushed towards the shore must return to the sea. This can create a strong current and this flow of water is known as a rip current.

Rip currents can be found on any beach with breaking waves and can be unpredictable. Some rip currents stay in fixed positions for long periods of time or can occur quickly without warning.

Rip currents are one of the main reasons for lifeguard rescues.

What does a rip current look like?

Rip currents can be very difficult for the average beach visitor. There are, however, a number of features of rip currents that a lifeguard can use to identify them:

• a channel of darker, choppy water

• an area where the water colour is different

• a line of foam, seaweed or rubbish moving steadily out to sea

• a break in the incoming wave pattern.

Dark areas caused by a lack of waves breaking in the deeper channels. Rip currents flow in these channels

A rippled patch of sea, when the water around is generally calm

Other indicators include:
• Foam on the water's surface
• Debris floating out to sea
• Discoloured, brown water caused by moving sands
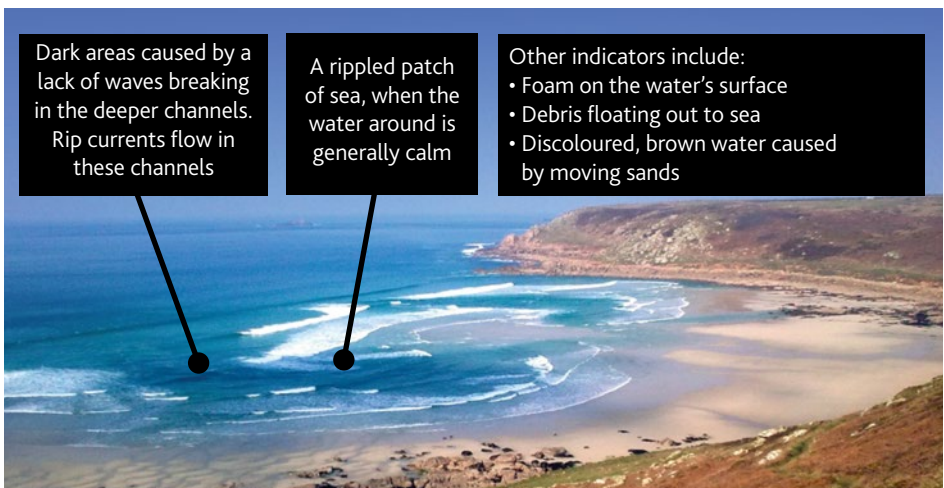
Escaping from a rip current

Rip currents pull people away from the shoreline.

People will instinctively try to swim back to the shore against the current, which can be very difficult due to the strength of the flow of water. This can quickly make the person very tired and in some cases cause them to drown.

The easiest way to escape from a rip current is to stay calm and float or swim parallel to the beach. Swimming in to shore with the breaking waves can help a person return to land. If you have something that floats, always stay with it.

Managing rip currents

Experienced lifeguards can use the flow of rip currents to reach a casualty quickly, avoiding large breaking waves.

Always inform the public about the location of a rip current. Move your swimming areas to keep swimmers away from rip currents.

Sometimes the only sign of a rip current may be the casualty moving out to sea.
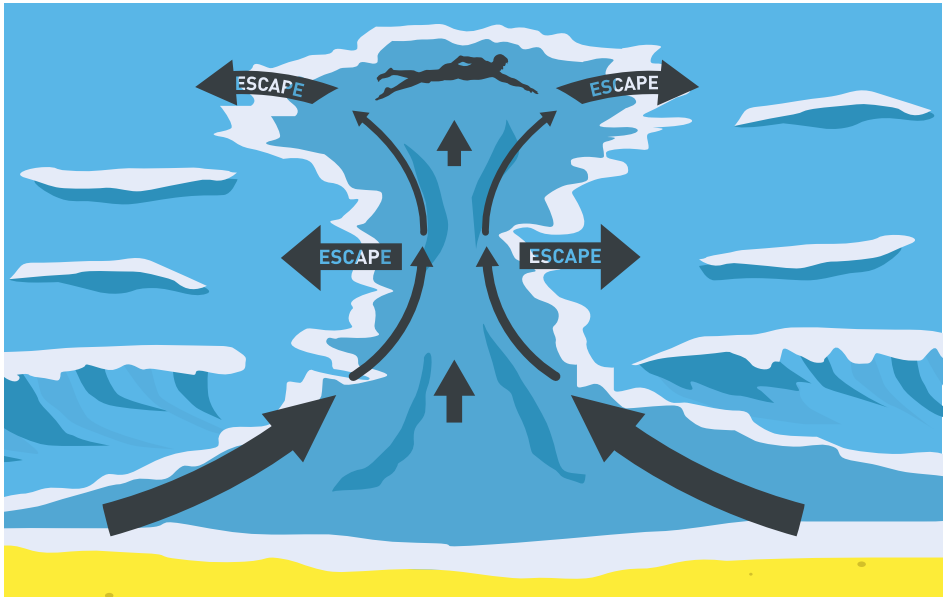
3.6 Tides

A tide can be defined as 'the movement of a body of water'.

This movement of water results in a regular and repeated rise and fall of the sea.

• The rise of the sea (tide coming in) is called a flood tide. At its maximum level, it reaches a period known as high water.

• The fall of the sea (tide going out) is called an ebb tide. At its minimum level, it reaches a point known as low water.

Many beach users will be unaware of when high and low tide will occur. Rising sea levels can quickly surround a previously safe area of the beach, cutting off the safe entry and exit points.

As the tides rise and fall and the water moves, currents may be created around rocks and structures, such as jetties and piers, and through channels in the sand. Dangerous objects, which were previously visible, may also be covered by the water and become invisible.

Tidal information

Tidal information can be obtained from a number of sources:

• tide tables

• newspapers

• internet

• local people.

Types of tide

Tides are caused by the gravitational effect of the sun and the moon on the earth.

Spring tides

When the sun, moon and earth are in line, we get a spring tide. With spring tides we get higher high waters and lower low waters.

Neap tides

When the sun and moon are at right angles to the earth we get neap tides. With neap tides we get lower high waters and higher low waters.

High tide – may conceal hidden dangers

Low tide

Unit 4: Zoning and observation

Learning outcomes

4.1   Know where to set up a patrol zone.

   Understand the meaning of different types of flags.

   Understand when lifeguards should patrol.

   Understand the factors that affect the structure of the patrol zones.

4.2   Understand how to observe and scan beach and water users.

4.3   Understand how to identify different types of casualties.

4.1 Lifeguard patrols

A patrol zone is the area of the beach where the lifeguard is responsible for keeping beach users safe.

The lifeguard should make the patrol zone visible so that beach users know the safest place to use the water. Lifeguards must also talk to beach users and give advice on why the area has been selected. This may change day to day or hour to hour according to conditions.

An international flag system has been developed, and is used around the world.

The flags should only be used if a lifeguard is on duty.

Red and yellow flags

An area between two red and yellow flags indicates the safest place on the beach for people to swim, bodyboard or use inflatable objects such as rubber tyres.

A lifeguard should make sure that the red and yellow flagged swimming area:

• does not contain any strong rip currents or hidden holes

• does not contain any dangerous objects, such as large underwater rocks or sewage pipes

• is not positioned too close to a boat/jet ski launching or operating area

When the red and yellow flags are in position, the lifeguard must be confident that they can conduct a rescue successfully in the patrol zone.

Red flag

A red flag indicates danger.

Weather and wave conditions may influence the ability of a lifeguard to conduct a rescue. A lifeguard should put a red flag on the beach if they feel the condition of the water is too dangerous for people to swim in.

If the lifeguard is not confident that they can perform a rescue, a red flag should be used.

A red flag may be used when:

- there is stormy weather
- persistent strong currents occur
- there are large waves
- there is pollution in the water
- a dangerous animal (such as a shark or jellyfish) has been seen in the water.

A red flag can also be used when there is anything else that lifeguards consider dangerous and when they believe that people's safety will be put at risk.
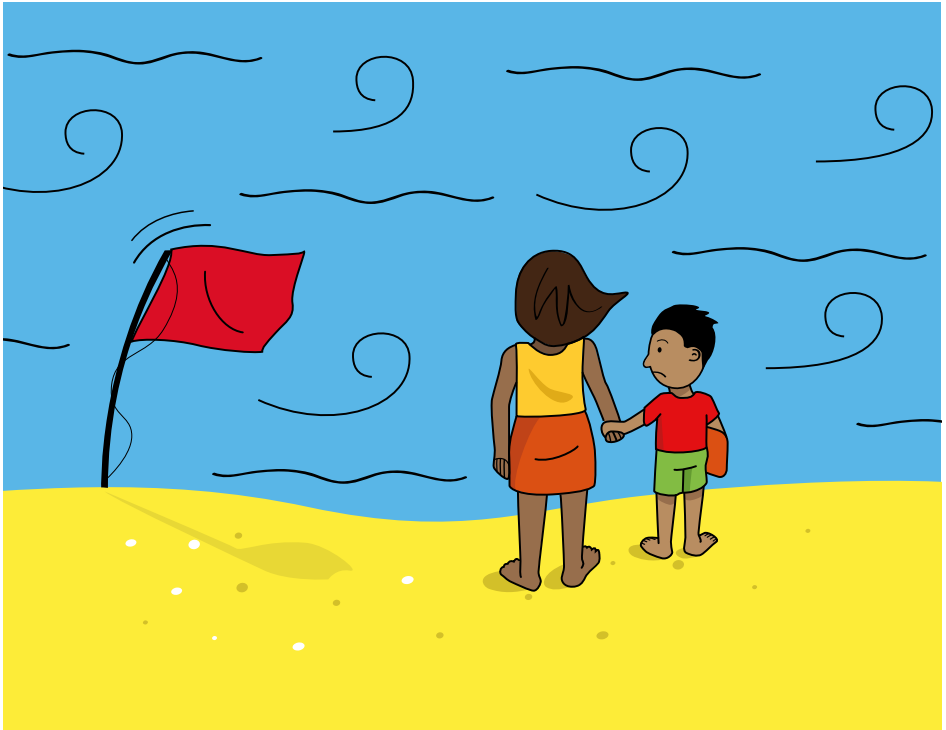
Other flags

Black and white flags can be used to create a zone for hard craft such as surfboards and other craft.

Beach users should check the local signs to establish the exact meaning of the black and white flags, as this can vary from beach to beach.
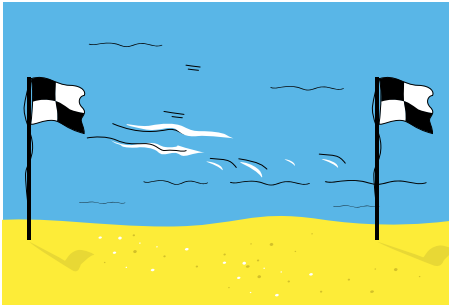
An orange windsock can also be used to tell beach users that the wind is blowing offshore and inflatables should not be used.
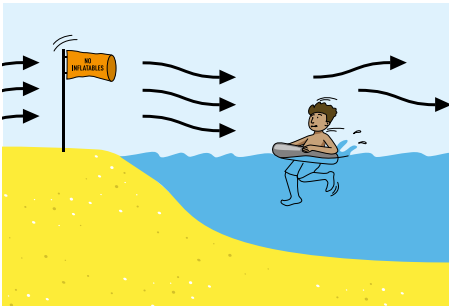
When should lifeguards patrol?

The lifeguard service should identify the busy times of day and consider the dangers on the beach.

In many hot countries, people use the beach early in the morning and late in the evening when it's less hot.

A lifeguard service should decide the best times to patrol its area. It should make sure that the maximum number of beach users is being supervised by the lifeguards.

Lifeguard patrols should be at regular times so that beach users know when a lifeguard is on duty and when it is safe to use the water.

Lifeguards should rotate regularly to stay alert.
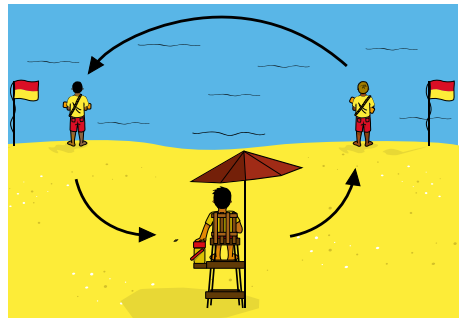
What makes up a patrol?

The structure of the patrol will depend on the:

- number of lifeguards available
- skill and experience of the lifeguards
- equipment that is available
- dangers
- size and type of beach.

All areas of the patrol zone should be visible to the lifeguard. If an area cannot be seen then it should not be in the patrol zone.

There should always be at least one lifeguard observing each flagged area, and another lifeguard to provide assistance in the event of an emergency.

4.2 How to scan the beach and water

Being a lifeguard requires great concentration, often supervising hundreds or thousands of people on the beach or in the water. It is not possible to watch everyone at the same time.

A crucial part of a lifeguard's job is to scan the beach and water regularly to look for anyone who is likely to get into trouble in the water. To make sure that an incident is not missed, scanning an area should be done quickly and regularly.

When scanning the water, a lifeguard needs to have a rough idea of how many people there are in the water and their abilities. The lifeguard should pay special attention to weak swimmers, without forgetting the other water users.

In the picture below, the lifeguard on the high chair is able to scan the whole zone, due to their elevated position. The lifeguards on the beach have a smaller, more specific zone to scan more high-risk beach users, or users near specific hazards.

There are several ways that lifeguards can scan the beach and water. These include the following:

1. On busy days lifeguards can share the responsibility of watching water users –

   - one lifeguard can watch the left side of the zone

   - one lifeguard can watch the centre of the zone

   - one lifeguard can watch the right side of the zone.

2. Lifeguards can work together and watch a specific hazard in the patrol zone that may be attractive to swimmers/bathers.

3. Water users can sometimes be hidden from a lifeguard's view. Using a high chair, lifeguard tower or other elevated position will provide the lifeguard with better visibility.

4. Lifeguards can scan from the water either by wading out or keeping watch from craft such as a rescue board or surfboard.

5. Binoculars can be used to help observe people far from the shore or a long way down the beach.

When scanning a beach it is important to observe changing weather and sea conditions. These often indicate that new dangers, such as rip currents, may form on the beach.

It is important that lifeguards are able to supervise the beach without suffering from tiredness or lack of concentration. To reduce the feeling of tiredness, regular rotation of lifeguards into different positions (and keeping them hydrated) will help to keep them alert.

The optimum time to spend supervising one area is 20 minutes.
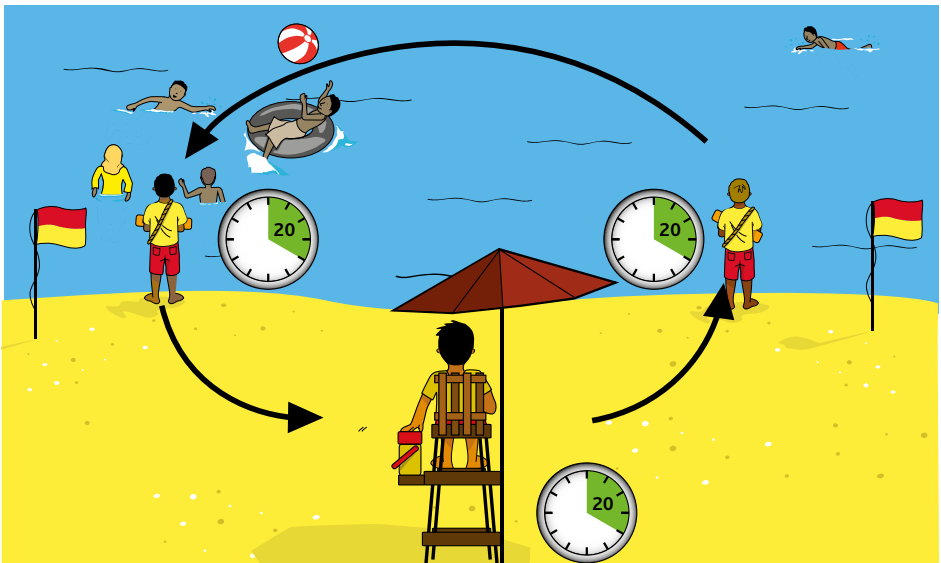
4.3 How to identify a casualty

It is important that a lifeguard can recognise a person who needs assistance in the water, although people react differently when they are in distress. Below are a number of signs that a lifeguard should watch out for.

Weak swimmer

A weak swimmer is a person that uses only basic swimming strokes and struggles to keep their head above the water. This may be because they:

• have limited swimming skills

• are tired

• have a minor injury.

Signs of a weak swimmer include:

• shouting for help

• weak swimming stroke

• look of panic.

Non-swimmer

A non-swimmer is a person who is unable to use basic swimming strokes to keep their head above the water. This may be because they:

• are physically exhausted

• are panicked

• don't know how to swim.

Signs of a non-swimmer may include:

• unable to call for help

• being vertical in the water

• non-effective leg kick

• vigorous arm movements and splashing.

A weak or non-swimmer may submerge in the water very quickly and silently. A lifeguard may have less than 20 seconds to assist.

Weak swimmers may listen to commands from lifeguards and reach for nearby rescue equipment.

Non-swimmers, although conscious, will probably not respond to commands or reach for nearby rescue equipment, since their main priority is keeping their head above water to breathe.

Injured casualty

Many different injuries can occur in the sea, including muscle cramps, cuts, bruises and broken bones.

Signs of an injured casualty include:

• shouting for help

• staying still in the water

• holding the injured part of the body

• look of pain.

Rescue techniques should be adapted to:

• reduce the risk of making the injury worse during the rescue

• to ensure the comfort of the casualty.

A lifeguard may need additional help from other lifeguards to assist the casualty from the water.

Unconscious casualty

There are many reasons a person may become unconscious, for example:

• bang to the head, perhaps from a surfboard, boat or submerged object

• medical emergency, such as a heart attack, stroke or drunkenness

• unaided, a non-swimmer will soon become unconscious.

An unconscious person may float face down on the surface or sink underwater.

If an unconscious person is face down in the water, breathing will stop and must be started again as soon as possible if the casualty is to survive.

Unit 5: Communications

Learning outcomes

5.1 Understand communication skills for lifeguarding

5.2 Understand the meaning of different whistle blasts.

5.3 Understand when to use lifeguard hand signals.
   Be able to use hand signals correctly in an operational environment.

5.1 Communication skills for lifeguarding

Good communication is very important for lifeguarding. As a lifeguard you must communicate with:

• Other lifeguards

• People on the beach

• People in the water

• Other rescue services e.g. police.

Keeping people safe on the beach and in the water often requires lifeguards to communicate messages clearly and effectively.

When speaking to members of the public it is important to:

• Maintain eye contact – remove your sunglasses in order to do this.

• Have open body language – do not cross your arms

• Be calm and respectful at all times

• Explain things to people clearly

• Use words which they will understand.

When speaking to other lifeguards it is important to:

• Keep messages clear and brief

• Use standard words, especially if using a radio.

Although it is rare, sometimes you may experience conflict with a beach user. If this happens you must remember:

• Stay calm

• Respect their opinion

• Do not become aggressive towards them

• Keep a safe distance from them

• Notify another lifeguard of you position

• If you feel the situation is in any way dangerous, then leave it.

Lifeguards on patrol must be able to communicate with other lifeguards and beach users, often over long distances.

Whistle blasts and hand signals are used to attract the attention of other lifeguards and beach users, and to pass on important information.

5.2 Whistle signals

Whistles should be carried by a lifeguard when on patrol. They can be heard over relatively long distances.

It is important to remember that if a whistle is used too often then its significance will decrease and people will take no notice when it is used.
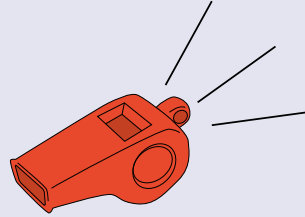
1 whistle blast
Attract the attention of beach users
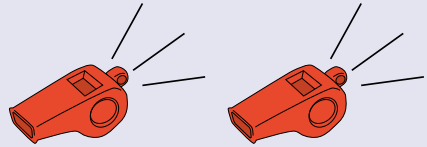
2 whistle blasts
Attract the attention of another lifeguard
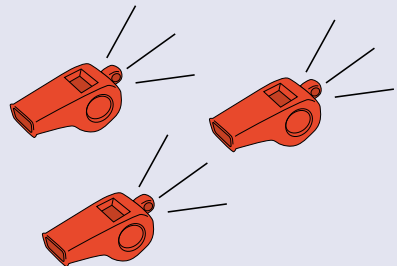
3 whistle blasts
Lifeguard taking emergency action

5.3 Hand signals

Hand signals can be used to pass on information to beach users and other lifeguards. It is important that lifeguards understand the hand signals to avoid confusion during an emergency.

The following hand signals should be used by a lifeguard on the shore to communicate with another lifeguard in the water:

I don't understand – please repeat
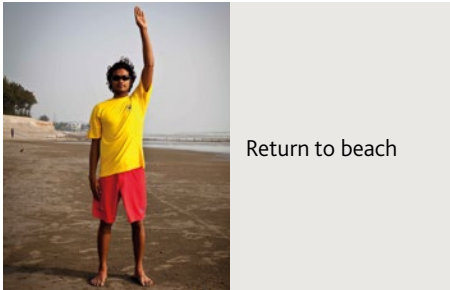
Return to beach
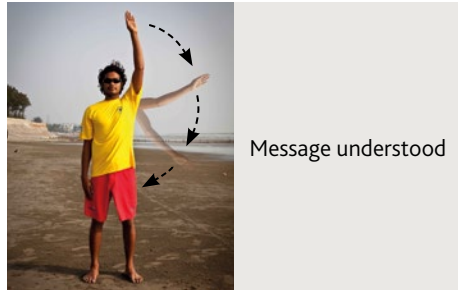
Message understood
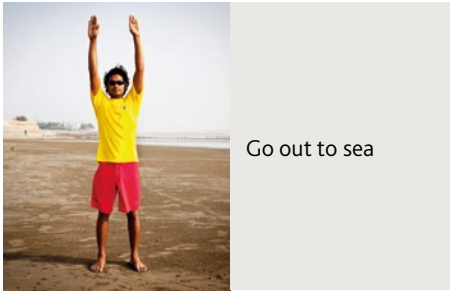
Go out to sea
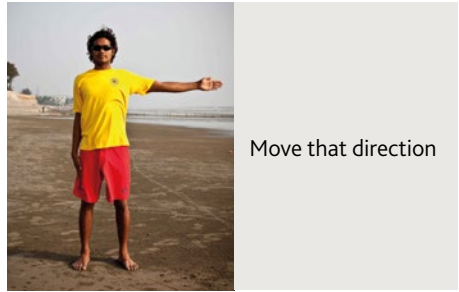
Move that direction
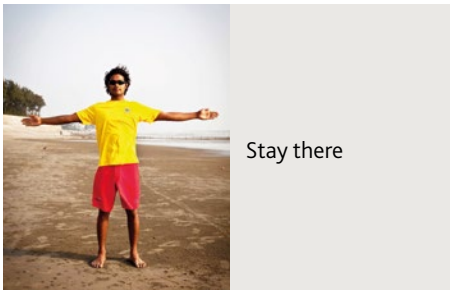
Stay there
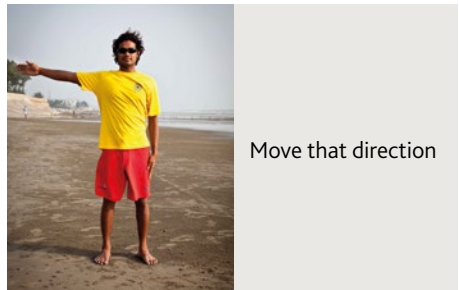
Move that direction

Check an object in the water

Pick up swimmers (spin upper arm and point in direction of swimmers)

The following signal should be used by a lifeguard in the water to a lifeguard on the shore:

Send help

All clear/OK

Submerged patient missing

Learning outcomes

6.1   Understand 'Stop, Think, Act, Review'.

6.2   Understand risk versus benefit.

6.3   Know the types of rescue equipment and when they should be used.
       Understand the advantages and disadvantages of each type of rescue equipment.

6.1 Stop, Think, Act, Review

Preventative actions will not stop all incidents from occurring. Incidents usually occur in busy environments.

A lifeguard must be prepared to take emergency action to assist people in the water and on the shore.

A lifeguard may have to make a quick – and possibly lifesaving – decision under great stress.

It is important that a lifeguard takes time to make a good assessment of what is happening and consider all possible options before providing assistance.

Important lessons can be learned from reviewing the rescue. This can be done in a four-stage process – **Stop, Think, Act, Review**.

Stop

- Where is the casualty?
- What is wrong with the casualty?
- Call for the help of another lifeguard or member of the public.
- Look for suitable rescue aids.

Think

- How will you get to the casualty and what equipment will you need?
- What are the dangers to yourself and to the casualty?
- How will you rescue the casualty and where will you bring them to?
- How will you treat the casualty?
- Will you need further assistance?

Act

- Carry out the rescue.
- Provide appropriate medical treatment.
- Go for further assistance if necessary.

Review

- Record the incident.
- How could you prevent the incident from happening again?
- Could anything have been done differently?
  - Was the rescue equipment used appropriately?
  - Was the correct medical treatment given?

6.2 Risk versus benefit

Before risking their own safety, lifeguards must decide how successful their rescue attempt is likely to be. When rescuing a casualty, your priorities are:

1. You

2. Your team

3. The casualty

4. The casualty's equipment.

The rescuer should:

• take account of the hazards and potential risks when considering a rescue

• develop a plan that minimises the risk to both rescuers and casualties.

The chart below should be used as a mental guide before a rescue, and re-evaluated during the rescue.
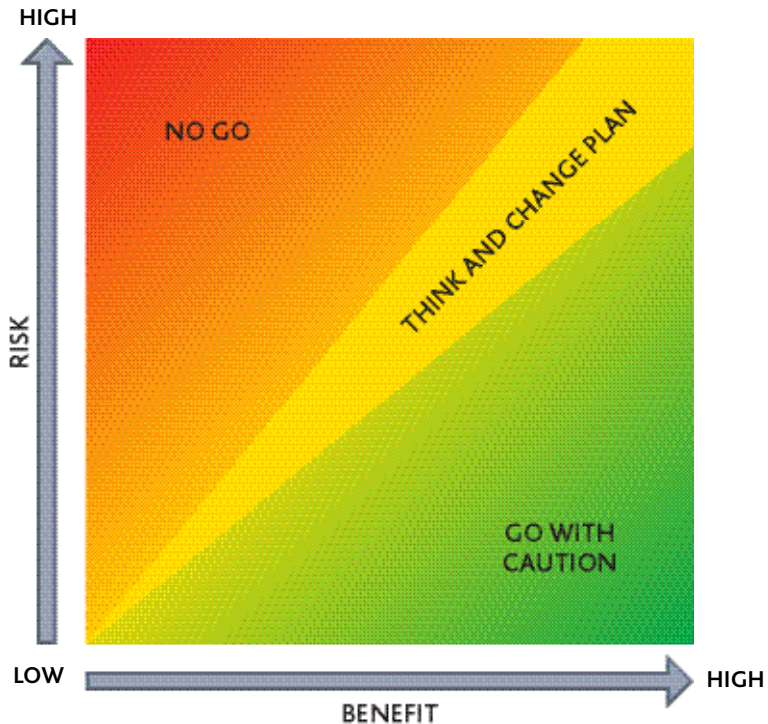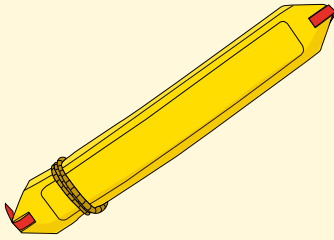
6.3 Rescue equipment

There is a range of equipment that may be used to conduct a rescue.

Rescue tube
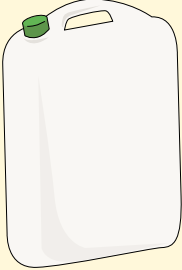
Description	A buoyant and flexible object made of foam. A long strap is attached at one end.
Advantages	• Lightweight and easy to carry. • Can support an unconscious casualty. • Can support multiple casualties.
Disadvantages	• Metal clip may cause injury if thrown. • Unavailable in many countries.

Rescue board/surfboard

Description	**Rescue board** A long stable surfboard with multiple handles for a casualty and rescuer to hold onto. **Surfboard** Often found at tourist beaches around the world.
Advantages	• Extremely buoyant. • Quick to reach a casualty and return to shore. • Effective in surf. • Can support multiple casualties.
Disadvantages	• Can be difficult to manoeuvre in large surf. • Needs significant skill and practice. • Easily damaged and difficult to transport. • Relatively expensive. • Unavailable in many countries.

Water container

Similar equipment can be produced locally using low-cost materials, such as a water container or a comparable item that floats.

Description	Standard liquid container, ideally 5-litre capacity or above. The container should be able to support a casualty.
Advantages	• Widely available • Durable • Can attach a rope to the handle to give the lifeguard distance from the casualty.
Disadvantages	• Can be difficult to hold when wet • Possibility of leakage.

Unit 7: Rescues

Learning outcomes

7.1   Know the level of risk associated with different types of rescue.

7.2   Be able to do a shout and signal rescue.

Be able to do a reach rescue.

Be able to do a throw rescue.

7.3   Be able to do a wade rescue.

7.4   Be able to rescue a conscious casualty using a board.

Be able to rescue an unconscious casualty using a board.

7.5   Be able to enter the water and approach a casualty safely.

Be able to rescue a conscious casualty using a rescue aid.

Be able to rescue an unconscious casualty using a rescue aid.

Understand which lifesaving tow should be used for different types of casualties.

Be able to rescue a casualty without a rescue aid.

7.1 Rescue options

Conducting a rescue

It is important to let another member of the lifeguard team know that you are conducting a rescue. They can then provide assistance with the rescue or go for further help if necessary.

To signal that you are taking emergency action, shout for help and blow your whistle three times.

Rescuing a drowning casualty is dangerous and many people drown each year while trying to help someone else in the water. A number of different rescue options may be available to a lifeguard. It is important that a lifeguard is competent in all of them.

Conducting a rescue from land is the safest type of rescue for a lifeguard. This does not require entry into dangerous water or direct contact with a drowning casualty.

When deciding which type of rescue to use, consider each method and decide which one is the most appropriate.

Shout and signal	**Lowest risk**
Reach	
Throw	
Wade	
Row or paddle	
Swim with an aid	
Swim and tow	**Highest risk**

7.2 Land-based rescues

Shout and signal rescue

When?
- When the person in trouble is close to shore.

Why?
- It requires no equipment and the rescuer stays out of danger.

How?
- Follow steps 1 and 2 below.
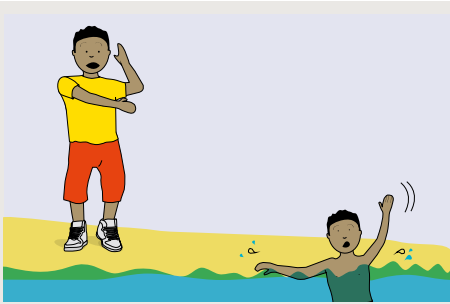
Step 1
- Get the attention of the person in the water.
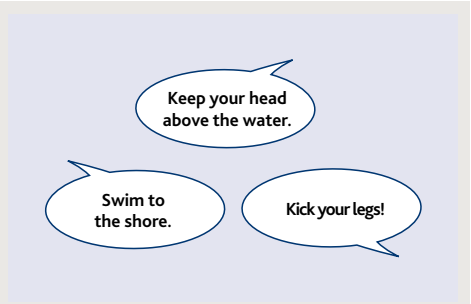
Step 2
- Use your voice and hand signals to encourage the person to swim to the shore.

Reach rescue

When?

- When the casualty is close to shore.

Why?

- It is the safest type of rescue.

How?

- Follow steps 1 and 2 below.
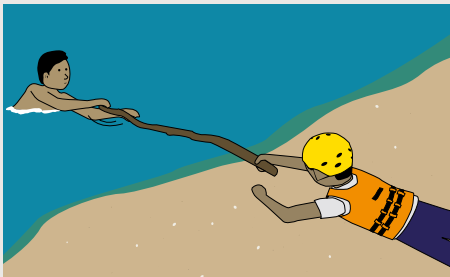
Step 1

- Reach the person using a long rigid object, such as a stick, pole or rescue tube.
- Stay low on the ground so that the person cannot pull you into the water.
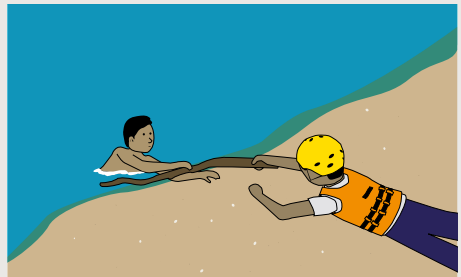
Step 2

- Pull the person to the shore.

Throw rescue

When?

- If the casualty is close to shore but too far away to conduct a reach rescue.

Why?

- Reduces the risk to the rescuer – no need to swim.

How?

- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.
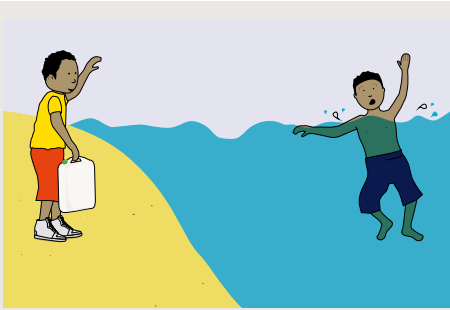
Step 1
- Attract the attention of the casualty.
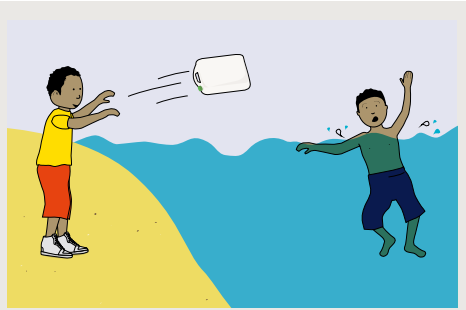
Step 2
- Throw a floating object to the casualty such as a water container or rescue tube.
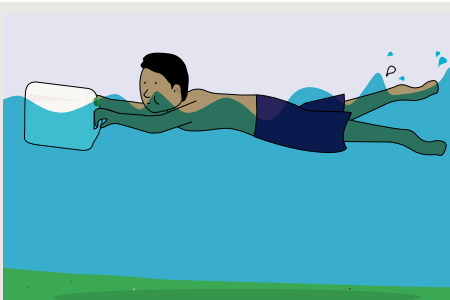
Step 3
- Tell the casualty to kick their legs and swim in to the shore.

Step 4
- Help the casualty out of the water.

7.3 Wade rescue

When?

- If the casualty is close to shore and in shallow water. The casualty may have stepped into a 'hole'.

Why?

- Reduces risk to rescuer – no need to swim.
- Does not require a rescue aid.

How?

- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.
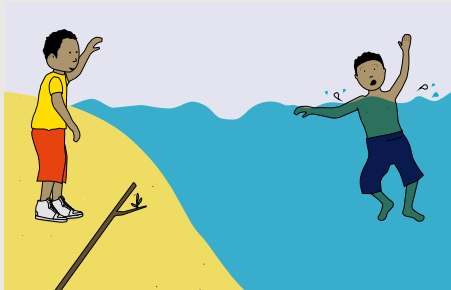
Step 1
- Attract the attention of the casualty.

Step 2
- Enter the water carefully, taking a stick/pole with you if possible to test the water depth and for the casualty to hold onto.

Step 3
- Pass one end of a stick/pole to the casualty.

Step 4
- Help the casualty out of the water.

7.4 Board rescues

When using a board there are some simple rules to follow to ensure good technique.

Moving through shallow water

- Place your hands on the sides of the board (the rails) and push down, lifting your legs to hop through the water.
- When you are at waist depth pull yourself onto the board into a lying position.

When lying flat while paddling

- Lift your shoulders and chest up from the board while paddling in a front crawl motion.
- Ensure your weight is positioned on the board so that the front is not going under the water or sticking up in the air too much.

Paddling through small waves

- Paddle hard and fast up to the wave.
- Place your hands on the side on the board, pushing it down. Lift your chest to allow the water to pass between you and the board.

Paddling through large waves

- Paddle hard and fast up to the wave.
- Place your hands on the side on the board, pushing it down. Lift your chest to allow the water to pass between you and the board.

When kneeling while paddling

- Reach both arms forward together and dig down into the water, pulling your arms back to your hips.

- Keep your bottom up in the air so that the water level is in line with your elbows when you are pulling.

- Ensure your weight is positioned on the board so that the front is not going under the water or sticking up in the air too much.

Catching a wave (one person)

- Keep the board pointing straight into the shore.

- Paddle until you feel the wave at your feet.

- Slide backwards on the board so that the front stays above the water.

- Hold onto the sides of the board. Adjust your weight and use your feet to steer.

Catching a wave (with a casualty)

- Keep the board pointing straight into the shore.

- Slide to the back of the board to prevent the casualty from going under the water as the board catches the wave.

- Paddle until you feel the wave at your feet.

- Hold onto the sides of the board. Adjust your weight and use your feet to steer.

7.4 Board rescues

With a conscious casualty

When?
•   If a board is available.

Why?
•   Fast response to reach the casualty and quick return to shore.
•   Effective in surf and can support more than one casualty.

How?
•   Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

Step 1
•   Enter the water with the board and paddle to the casualty. Approach on the shoreside of the casualty. Keep checking their position.

Step 2
•   Move to the back of the board and assist the casualty onto the middle of the board.

Step 3
•   Paddle the casualty to shore and assist off the board.

Step 4
•   Provide appropriate aftercare.

Board rescue – with an unconscious casualty

When?

• If a surfboard or rescue board is available.

Why?

• Fast response to reach casualty and quick return to shore.
• Allows for rescue breathing in the water.

How?

• Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

Step 1

• Enter the water and approach the casualty. When at the casualty, turn the board upside down and lean over the board. Keep the board facing into the wind/waves.

Step 2

• Support the casualty. Check breathing for   10 seconds. If not breathing, cover the mouth and give five rescue breaths through the nose.

Step 3

• Turn the casualty onto the board.

Step 4

• Move the casualty fully onto the board. Paddle the casualty to the beach.

7.5 Swimming rescues

Rescues that require the lifeguard to swim are more dangerous than rescues from the land because:

- of the dangers of the water
- the casualty may panic and grab the rescuer.

A swimming rescue should only be attempted if there is no option of a land-based rescue.

Where possible, rescue equipment that floats should be used to assist with the rescue of a conscious casualty. If rescue equipment is not available, or the casualty is unconscious, then a lifeguard must be able to do a contact tow to bring the casualty back to shore.

Entering the water

Before entering the water, find where the casualty is.

Choose the shortest and safest way to get to the casualty. This may involve moving along the beach before getting into the water. Think about currents and tidal movements.

If the depth of water is unknown, or there may be submerged objects, run or wade up to chest depth before starting to swim.

If the depth is known then a shallow dive can be used.

Large waves

- **Dive through the base of the wave with hands in front to protect your head.**
- **Dig your fingers in the sand.**
- **Pull yourself forwards to surface the other side of th**e wave.

Swimming to a casualty

When swimming to a casualty, the lifeguard should swim on their front and bring their head out of the water regularly to look at the casualty.

The lifeguard should shout to the casualty so that they know help is coming.

Saving energy

Although a lifeguard should try to get to a casualty as quickly as possible, it is important that they save enough energy for the return journey. Lifeguards should practise their swimming technique to make sure it is efficient in the water.

Approaching a conscious casualty

A distressed casualty may try to grab the lifeguard if they get too close. The lifeguard should keep a safe distance away from the casualty (3 metres) so they can try and calm the casualty down by talking to them.

If the lifeguard has a buoyant rescue aid then this should be passed to the casualty from a safe distance.

Defending yourself

A distressed casualty may try to grab the lifeguard if they get too close. To prevent this, the lifeguard should raise their legs towards the casualty and kick them away, or submerge themselves to escape.

If the lifeguard has no rescue aid then they must get into a position where they can avoid being grabbed by the casualty. The lifeguard should swim behind the casualty and provide words of reassurance to calm them down. They can then provide instructions on what actions they should take to help the lifeguard tow them to shore.

Communicating with a casualty

I'm a lifeguard, I'm going to help you.

You are going to be OK.

Kick your legs.

Approaching an unconscious casualty

If the casualty is unconscious they need to be taken back to the beach as quickly as possible. If they are face down they should be secured into a rescue aid and turned onto their back. This will help to keep them level in the water, making it easier for the lifeguard to tow them back to the shore.

Swimming strokes when towing

When towing a casualty back to shore, normal swimming strokes may not work. The lifeguard must learn a swimming stroke that enables them to support a casualty while still moving through the water. There are different types of strokes that may be used. The lifeguard must decide which stroke to use, based on the condition of the casualty and the type of rescue.

Sidestroke

A lifeguard can tow a casualty with or without a rescue aid using this stroke. They should swim on their side using one arm to move through the water by reaching forward and pulling the water towards the hips. The other hand secures the casualty, while the legs are kicked in a scissor action.

Towing using a rescue aid

When a floating object, such as a rescue tube, is used for a rescue, the lifeguard can hold the object rather than the casualty. The lifeguard holds the object with one hand and tows the casualty on their side using a sidestroke.

A long strap is often attached to the rescue equipment. This gives the lifeguard greater distance from the casualty when towing and is therefore safer for the lifeguard.

If a strap is available then:

- the lifeguard can hold the strap and tow the casualty on their side using a sidestroke
- put the strap over their shoulder and across their chest. With both hands free, the lifeguard can use a front crawl stroke to tow the casualty back to shore.

Swim rescue using a rescue tube – conscious casualty

When?

- If the casualty is conscious and too far away from shore to throw a rescue tube.

Why?

- Does not put the lifeguard in direct contact with the casualty.

How?

- Choose the most suitable method below.

Method 1

Single casualty holding rescue tube

- Can be used for a weak or injured casualty who is able to hold on.
- Should only be used in flat water or over short distances.
- Should not be used for non-swimmers.

Method 2

Single casualty secured into rescue tube

- Can be used for a weak or injured casualty who is unable to hold on.
- Must be used for a non-swimmer.
- Must be used to secure a casualty in surf.

Method 3

Multiple casualties holding rescue tube

- Can be used to support multiple casualties who are able to hold on.

Swim rescue using a rescue tube – unconscious casualty

When?

- If the casualty is unconscious and too far away from shore to throw a rescue aid or wade.

Why?

- Does not put the lifeguard in direct contact with the casualty.

Ho w?

- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

Step 1

- Enter the water with a rescue tube, swim to the casualty and keep checking their position.

Step 2

- Use the rescue tube to support the casualty.

Step 3

- Turn the casualty onto their back. If possible, secure the floating object or hold in a position that supports the casualty. Their face must be out of the water. Check for breathing. If they are not breathing, and if they are able to (depending on the lifeguard's ability, equipment and environment), give five rescue breaths.

Step 4

- Tow the casualty to shore and provide aftercare.

Towing without a rescue aid

If there is no floating object or rescue tube available, a lifeguard must have direct contact with the casualty to tow them back.

There are a number of different ways to secure a casualty when towing:

Cross-chest tow

The cross-chest tow allows the lifeguard to have good control of the casualty and is best for towing a panicking casualty.

This tow gives the casualty a feeling of security as their head is out of the water and they stay in close contact with the lifeguard.

- The lifeguard reaches over the shoulder and across the chest, and holds the casualty just below the armpit.
- The lifeguard then tucks the casualty's shoulder securely into their own armpit.
- The lifeguard turns onto their side so that their hip is directly beneath the lower section of the casualty's back.

Extended chin tow

The extended chin tow is usually used for an unconscious or cooperative casualty. It is suitable for towing over long distances and is the most efficient tow.

- Leaning backwards, the lifeguard reaches over the shoulder of the casualty and cups the casualty's chin in the palm of their hand.
- The lifeguard swims with their free arm and legs, moving the casualty into a horizontal position.
- The lifeguard can then tow the casualty to shore.

Close-chin tow

The close-chin tow is used to give extra support to the casualty. It allows the lifeguard to talk to and look at the casualty when bringing them to shore. This gives the casualty a greater feeling of security, and greater control to the lifeguard.

- Leaning backwards, the lifeguard should reach over the shoulder of the casualty and cup the casualty's chin in the palm of their hand.
- The lifeguard places the other hand under the casualty's armpit.
- The lifeguard swims with their free arm and legs, moving the casualty into a horizontal position.
- The lifeguard moves the head of the casualty onto their shoulder (the same side as the hand used to hold the chin with).
- The lifeguard can tow the casualty to shore.

Returning a casualty through waves

When returning to shore with a casualty the lifeguard must make sure that the casualty's airway remains clear and is not submerged under water.

A broken wave may submerge the casualty under water. While towing back to shore the lifeguard should look out for waves.

If a large wave is spotted then the lifeguard should move behind the casualty and pull them in close to their body to protect them from the force of the wave.

The lifeguard will also need to protect themselves from being injured by the casualty's head.

Always remember that if the lifeguard is injured during a rescue, both the lifeguard and casualty become at risk.

Be ready to defend yourself if the casualty becomes scared and tries to grab you.

Swim rescue without using a rescue aid – conscious casualty

When?

• If the casualty is conscious and no rescue aids are available.

Why?

• Allows the lifeguard to conduct a rescue without a rescue aid.

How?

• Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

Step 1

• Enter the water and swim to the casualty. Keep checking the position of the casualty.

Step 2

• On approaching the casualty, keep a safe distance. Reassure the casualty.

Step 3

• Ask the casualty to turn around, or swim behind the casualty.

Step 4

• Tow the casualty to shore and provide appropriate aftercare.

Swim rescue without using a rescue aid – unconscious casualty

When?
- If the casualty is unconscious and no rescue aid is available to use.

Why?
- Allows the lifeguard to rescue a casualty who is unconscious in the water.

How?
- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

Step 1
- Enter the water and swim to the casualty. Keep checking the position of the casualty.

Step 2
- Turn the casualty onto their back.

Step 3
- Keep their face out of the water.

Step 4
- Tow the casualty to shore and provide aftercare.

Learning outcomes

8.1 Understand the factors that affect the removal of a casualty from the water.

8.2 Understand how to support a casualty who can walk.

8.3 Be able to move a casualty who is unable to walk, using a single-person drag.

Be able to move a casualty who is unable to walk, using a two-person carry.

8.1 Removing a casualty from the water

A casualty should be removed from the water as quickly as possible so that necessary first aid can be given.

Lifeguards should work as a team to find a safe place to exit the water. This can be communicated using hand signals and whistle blasts.

The removal of a casualty from the water may be affected by the:

- size of the casualty and the number of lifeguards available
- type of beach (sand, stones, mud)
- injuries to the casualty
- tide, currents and waves.

Conducting a rescue can be exhausting for the rescuer and casualty. When a lifeguard nears the shore, other lifeguards should come to help as soon as it is safe to do so. The lifeguard should raise a hand in the air when they are able to stand.

If the lifeguard has to wait for assistance then they should secure the casualty by putting their arms under the casualty's shoulders and holding their wrists.

The casualty should be lifted so their head is out of the water and clear of any waves. If the casualty is unconscious the lifeguard should tilt the casualty's chin backwards to keep the airway open.

8.2 Moving a walking casualty

If a casualty is able to walk, the lifeguard may support them while they wade out of the water and up the beach.

To support the casualty, the rescuer should pin the casualty's arms by their side and steady their movements to prevent them from falling.

8.3 Moving a casualty who is unable to walk

When lifting any casualty, remember to:

- keep the casualty close to your body
- get a firm grip
- lift with your legs, not your back
- keep your back straight
- get someone else to help you.

Single-person drag

A casualty who is unconscious, injured or exhausted may be unable to exit the water without help. Removing a person from the water is easier if more people help. A lifeguard may have to ask for help from members of the public if there are no other lifeguards available. A number of simple techniques have been developed to carry a person from the water if the lifeguard is alone.

Single-person drag

When?
- If a casualty is unconscious, injured or exhausted.
- If no other assistance is available/if the lifeguard is alone.

Why?
- Removal of casualty from the water for treatment.

How?
- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

Step 1
- Lifeguard secures the casualty by putting their arms under the casualty's shoulders and holding their wrists.

Step 2
- Lifeguard lifts the casualty up and out of the water.

Step 3
- Lifeguard walks backwards up the beach and out of the water.

Step 4
- Lifeguard brings the casualty up the beach to a point of safety and lowers the casualty to the ground carefully, minimising movement of the head.

Two-person carry

When?
- If a casualty is unconscious, injured or exhausted. If another lifeguard or member of the public is available to assist.

Why?
- Fast removal of the casualty from the water for treatment.

How?
- Follow steps 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 below.

Step 1
- Call or signal for assistance before securing the casualty underneath the armpits. If you have a rescue aid around the casualty, ensure that any part of it does not drag on the ground to avoid falling over it.

Step 2
- Instruct the second person to lift the legs from above the knees. The rescuing lifeguard should give the command to lift.

Step 3
- Lift the casualty together and walk backwards up the beach. The person lifting the legs should provide directions to the rescuer (who may be unable to see where they are going, so fall or trip).

Step 4
- Once far enough away from the water, the casualty should be turned sideways to the shore and lowered to the ground into a sitting position. The rescuer should support their upper body while the other person removes the rescue aid (if present).

Step 5

- The second person should hold the casualty's wrists and lower them to the ground. The rescuing lifeguard should support the head and give the command to lower.

Identifying a point of safety

Beware of a rising tide

If the casualty is unconscious and requires cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), they may have to stay in the same position for some time. Make sure the casualty is moved far enough up the beach so that the tide will not reach your working area.

Keep members of the public away from the casualty and lifeguard.

Learning outcomes

9.1   Understand why recording information is necessary.
        Know what information needs to be recorded.

9.2   Understand the importance of a post-incident de-brief.

9.1 Keeping records

Why keep records?

Recording incidents and beach activity is important to measure and record success. It also helps improve the lifeguard service and identify any patterns of people getting into difficulty.

Some of the information you may be asked to gather may include:

• name and age of casualty

• what the incident was

• where the incident was

• what the lifeguard did

• what treatment was given

• if any other lifeguard was involved

• if any lifeguard was injured during the rescue.

How to document

Documentation should be made at regular intervals throughout the whole day. It should be checked by lifeguards at the end of each day and stored in a safe place.

It is important to maintain the privacy of casualty records and not release the names of casualties to the media.

You should use the forms provided to you by the lifeguard service operator.

Lifeguard Service Daily Report

Day (Circle): Monday / Tuesday / Wednesday / Thursday / Friday/ Saturday/ Sunday

Date: Day / Month / Year   Beach Name: ....

High Tide: ....   Low Tide: ....Special Holiday :Yes/No ....

Senior Lifeguard	Start Time	Finish Time	Paid / Volunteer (Circle)
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
Lifeguards on Duty			
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer
			Paid/Volunteer

Time	Wave Height	Weather	Number of People		Preventative Actions	Assistance	
			On beach	In water (Above waist depth)		First Aid	Rescue
Pre- 7am		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
7-8am		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
8-9am		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
9-10am		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
10-11am		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
11-12am		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
12am-1pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
1-2pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
2-3pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
3-4pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
4-5pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
5-6pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
6-7pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					
Post 7pm		Cloud/Rain/Storm/Sun					

Senior LG daily comments

Manager/Supervisor visit:

Name:	Time	Comments	Signature

Lifeguard Incident Report Form

General Information

Day (Circle): Monday / Tuesday / Wednesday / Thursday / Friday / Saturday / Sunday

Date: Day / Month / Year   Time: ....   Beach name: ....

Special Holiday: Yes / No If yes, which?................   Name of Lifeguard: ....

Nature of Incident	Location	Distance from lifeguarded area
☐ First Aid ☐ Water Rescue	☐ On the beach ☐ In water inside red & yellow ☐ In water outside red & yellow	☐ 0 – 100 metres ☐ 100 – 500 metres ☐ 500 + metres

Alerted to incident by	☐ Lifeguard	☐ Public	☐ Police	☐ Other,.........................
Activity of casualty	☐ Swimming ☐ Other,............................	☐ Inflatable	☐ Surfing/Body boarding	☐ Fishing

Environmental cause	☐ Rip currents	☐ Tidal cut off	☐ Onshore wind	☐ Offshore wind ☐ Other currents
Behavioural cause	☐ Exhausted	☐ Suicide	☐ Violence	☐ Unable to swim ☐ Not applicable
Method of rescue	☐ First aid ☐ Board rescue	☐ Wade	☐ Swim with equipment ☐ Swim no equipment	

Casualty Details: (Complete for each casualty – use a new form if necessary)

Number of casualties: ....

Casualty name:	....	Gender:	☐ Male	☐ Female
Home town:	....	Age:......	☐ Local	☐ Holiday
Level of consciousness on arrival:	☐ Conscious ☐ Unconscious	Was CPR given?	☐ Yes ☐ No	

If first aid was given, explain treatment	

Outcome:	☐ Conscious hospital ☐ Conscious walking	☐ Unconscious hospital ☐ Dead at scene

9.2 Post incident de-briefing

After a serious incident has occurred, such as a drowning or a major injury, it is important to conduct a de-brief with your lifeguard team.

Being involved in a serious incident can be upsetting for people and cause them feelings of stress, such as difficulty sleeping and flashbacks of the event. Experiencing these feelings for a short time is normal. Discussing the incident, soon after it has happened, can help people deal with these feelings of stress.

A de-brief is a conversation between the lifeguards involved in an incident to discuss what happened and how they feel about it. Normally this would be led by a senior or supervisor and be held away from the beach if possible. The lifeguards should be offered continued support by the senior or supervisor after the de-brief.

If a lifeguard is still experiencing feelings of stress three weeks after an incident, then the lifeguard manager should be informed so that further support can be given.

TP-INT-04