

# Rip currents

**BEWARE**  
**STRONG RIPS CAN**  
**CARRY YOU OUT**  
**TO SEA**

What is a rip current?

Rip currents are strong seaward directed flows of water that develop between shallow banks. They carry water and sand to the offshore, and can cause the development of deep channels in the seabed and localised shoreline erosion.

Recognising rips?

Rips currents can be recognised as the calm areas (blue water) between patches of breaking waves (white water).

What is the hazard?

Rip currents are difficult to spot from the beach. Swimmers can lose their footing in the deep channels and be carried out to sea by strong currents.

Different types of rips

- Shore normal rips are the most widely recognised. They flow straight out to sea. In large surf they extend offshore for 100s of metres.
- Swash rips develop only on steep beaches and extend seaward only for a short distance. They are still a hazard because they carry swimmers to deep water.
- Feeder rips are less obvious but equally dangerous to swimmers. They flow parallel to shore and feed water into the main rip channel. They can be very big.
- Multiple rips are likely to occur especially on embayed beaches.

Rips currents: a west or east coast hazard?

On beaches enclosed by headlands such as those on the Coromandel, rip currents tend to occur in the same place and are regularly spaced. On long open stretches of beach such as those of the west coast of the North Island, rip currents shift about with changing weather patterns.

When do rips occur?

When the surfs up! This is why on west coast beaches rips occur more often and the rips are stronger.

How to save yourself!

Don't get caught out – Swim between the flags or in the patches of white water and breaking waves where there is no rip. Ask advice on a safe place to swim. If you are caught in a rip - do not swim against the current, swim sideways until you find your feet again. Raise your hand to signal for help.

Shore normal rip



Photo by R. Shand

Swash rip



Photo by S. Douarin

Feeder rip



Photo by R. Brander

Multiple rips



www.niwa.co.nz/services/cam-era



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