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HEALTH OFFICIALS REMIND FLORIDIANS, VISITORS TO PRACTICE RIP CURRENT SAFETY



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Tallahassee, Fla.—Recent increased wave heights and gusty winds on Florida’s East Coast and Panhandle beaches serve as a reminder to take precautions to stay healthy and safe while swimming in coastal waters. It is important to know how to spot and avoid rip currents.

“Rip currents can send an unprepared swimmer into dangerous waters,” said Interim State Surgeon General Dr. Celeste Philip. “We want everyone to enjoy Florida’s beautiful beaches year-round and that starts with being alert, understanding your limits, and knowing exactly what to do to stay safe from rip currents.”

A rip current is a small, yet strong channel of water moving away from the beach. Rip currents form as waves disperse along the beach, causing water to become trapped between the beach and a sandbar or other underwater feature. Rip currents can travel as fast as five miles per hour, or eight feet per second.

Look carefully for these signs before entering the ocean:

- Change in water color from the surrounding water;
- A gap in the breaking waves, where the rip is forcing its way seaward through the surf zone;
- A choppy surface that extends beyond the breaking waves;
- Floating objects moving steadily seaward; and
- Water may be colder than the surrounding water.

What to do if caught in a rip current:

- Don’t panic—this wastes energy and keeps you from thinking clearly;
- Don’t attempt to swim against the current directly back to shore;
- Swim parallel to shore until you are out of the current;
- Float calmly out with the rip current if you cannot break out by swimming perpendicular to the current. When it subsides, just beyond the surf zone, swim diagonally back to shore; and
- If you tire, take rest breaks by floating as you attempt to work your way back to shore.

For more information on avoiding getting caught in a rip current, please visit <http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov/>. For current weather and water conditions, go to <http://www.floridadisaster.org/index.asp>.

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