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EDUCATION
OUTDOORS
EONZ NEW ZEALAND

Recreation
Aotearoa

# Beach and Surf Activities

**Good Practice Guide**
**Version 1**
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# Beach and Surf Activities

*Beach and Surf Activities include activities in and near the water on wave formed or effected beaches. They include beach-based skills or fun sessions, and surf-based activities such as wading or swimming in the ocean, the use of surf craft - all while being directly supervised by a designated leader, guide, instructor or supervisor.*
*These activities involve either intentional immersion, or the possibility of wave action unintendedly immersing participants.*

*The environmental scope is coastal beaches formed due to waves depositing sand or gravel along the shoreline. Generally, wave action is present, but the beach is relatively flat and access to the water is easy.*
*Activities on boulder formed shores, or rock outcrop coastlines are not included (the [Activity Safety Guideline for Coasteering](#) provides guidance on the latter).*
*Activities in inland waterways, including rivers, streams, ponds, waterholes, lakes and estuaries, are not included, but are covered by the Inland Waterway Swimming Activities GPG. It is possible that activities in some coastal environments could be best guided by considering the [Inland Waterway Swimming Activities GPG](#) along with this Beach and Surf Activities GPG.*

The scope of this GPG can be seen in this list below of activity examples:

Games and activities on a beach
Beach education and water safety programmes
Field trips such as geography studies
Environmental sessions
Shellfish gathering and surf casting
Wading and wave-jumping
Swimming and bodysurfing
Boogie boarding
Surfing – including with surfboards, surf skis or Stand Up Paddle boards

At times these activities may be informal and recreational in nature while still occurring within a formal or organised programme. Unsupervised participation in these activities in the participant's own time is not within the scope of this GPG.

This GPG covers situations where participants are being directly supervised by a designated leader, guide or instructor and does not cover the hire or rental of craft and equipment for unsupervised use.

> This guidance is specific to **Beach and Surf Activities** and is designed to be used in conjunction with the **[General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities](#)** and the **[Beach and Surf Activities Planning Template.](#)**

# Potential value of activity

**BEACH AND SURF ACTIVITIES CAN PROVIDE:**

- Development of water confidence and swimming skills through progression from swimming pool or flat-water experiences, to surf and/or deep water.

- Development of water safety skills, including understanding of when it is safe / not safe to enter the surf/ocean.

- An opportunity to experience the adventure, challenge and excitement of being in the surf.

- An opportunity to try new activities and have new experiences.

- Physical activity, fitness and mental health benefits.

- An opportunity to appreciate naturally formed environments and forces.

- Opportunities for interaction and socialising with peers.

- Enhancing and enriching the school curriculum e.g., environmental education.

- Appreciation of the power and energy of the natural environment and its effect and potential impact on people and the environment (e.g., geography context).

*"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."* Jon Kabat-Zinn.

# Planning Considerations

See the **General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities** and consider the following:

# Activity Planning

*An activity plan helps to maximize an activity's success and minimises risk to participants. The Beach and Surf Activities Planning Template provides a useful format.*

As surf conditions can change rapidly, so too can the risks associated with the activity. The leader must review the prevailing and forecast conditions before an activity session, note any hazards or changes to expected conditions and identify how they should be dealt with. Particular attention should be paid to:

- Wave height and direction

- Tide and its impact on water depth, the surf break etc

- Rips and/or drift currents

- Wind direction and strength

- Submerged hazards – rock, reef or debris

- Sand bars, gutters and holes

- Water temperature, and wind chill impact

- Access and egress - in case of any emergency

- The potential impact of other users.

- The impact of water pollution, particular after heavy rain events, which may linger for days e.g. https://www.safeswim.org.nz/

Note: It is recommended that a checklist is used and kept as a record of the conditions for the session.

Contact local authorities and/or surf clubs for information on local hazards and other useful information and support.

# Participants

*How to ensure the activities match the participants' abilities and needs.*

In addition to the generic participant considerations (see **General Guidance for Organized Outdoor Activities**), the organisers of beach-based activities should:

- Be confident that participants will listen to important safety instructions and demonstrate acceptable behaviours whilst carrying out activities.

- Make sure that participants have the ability to successfully perform the activities programmed.

- Divide participants into ability level groups in order to manage the range of abilities.

- Identify each participant's aquatic competency/ swimming ability

- Assess the participants prior experiences in the ocean, taking into consideration the difference between surf beaches (waves of varying heights) and flatwater beaches (no waves the majority of the time), wading and swimming 'out the back'.  This assessment should take knowledge, attitudes, prior experience, competence and confidence into account.

- Sequence the water activities to help identify strengths and weaknesses in the group e.g., start with wading and shallow water activities before moving out slightly deeper (waist depth), and then deeper again.

# Participant competencies

*What participants need to know and do to ensure their safety in the ocean and/or surf environments.*

- Understand emergency response signals eg/ by hand, whistle, and signalling for help

- Identify their position on and movement along the beach, landmarks, and the meeting point on shore

- Have knowledge and/or experience of rip currents, undertow, drift, wave types, depth of water, sand bars, wave formation, sediment movement etc

- Demonstrate stationary and deep-water skills, including:

    - Floating, treading water, swimming and going under waves

    - Different forms of propulsion – wading, dolphin dives, using waves to return to shore

    - Protection in the waves – including cover head, feet first, stay calm

    - What to do with any equipment they have e.g., a surf board

    - Remaining calm in waves and recirculating/aerated water (white water after a wave passes can cause panic as it's harder to float)

- Understand how cold water and weather conditions affect body temperature

- Understand surfing etiquette/rules.

# Supervision

*The level and style of supervision typically required for this activity.*

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION STRUCTURE FOR ACTIVITIES:**

## On the Beach

- Prior to commencing a beach session, there should be a clear briefing on expectations and behavioural consequences. Where possible these expectations should be introduced before entering the coastal environment e.g., in the classroom or other appropriate base.

- Check for local warning/caution signs at beach access points for local hazards and dangers.

- Boundaries are clearly marked out and emphasised (alignment with landmarks such trees, buildings, or lampposts are more likely to be visible than cones). Parent helpers/assistants are expected to understand and reinforce the boundaries.

- Where 'beach only' activities (with the water's edge 'out of bounds') require participants to retrieve water for the activity, they should ask a competent leader/assistant/parent helper to enter and retrieve the water for them.

## In the water

- Any of these factors would indicate that the water shouldn't be entered:

    - The presence of holes, gutters, sand bars, rips and/or drift currents, in or near the activity site, where these pose a risk of harm

    - The presence of large waves and/or surging up the beach – which have the potential for participants to be wiped off their feet

    - There aren't sufficient supervisors; and/or they aren't appropriately competent, or don't feel personally confident, in the prevailing conditions

    - There isn't sufficient rescue capability or resource.

    **If in doubt, stay out**

- A supervisor in the water needs to be competent and confident in the environment they are supervising. This must include their ability to maintain their own and others safety, in relation to the potential impact of the rip/drift currents, gutters, holes, surges and other hazards.

- Supervision in a water environment needs to focus on preventing participants from needing assistance in the first place. I.e., how can we ensure that no physical intervention is required during our session?

- There is no one 'ratio' of leaders or supervisors to participants for any given activity. Supervision should vary according to age and competency of the participants, the

activity, the location and environmental conditions, and the skill and experience of the leaders and supervisors.

- Other factors that will affect the supervision requirements of a group include participants with special needs, behavioural issues, specific medical needs, non-swimmers or non-floaters and ESOL students.

- Participants need to have clear boundaries in the water and supervisors must be in control of the situation at all times. Supervision should be strict, in order to ensure participants don't go past their limits or enter/engage with any identified hazard.

- Supervisors could split participants into smaller groups using the rainbow system - participants wear different coloured rash vests or surf lifesaving type bennies or swimming caps depending on age/ability to identify different supervision groups.

- Check in with participants about their personal comfort level once they are in the water

- Participants should be made aware of the significant hazards, specific to the conditions e.g., in dumping waves it is important to protect your head/neck/back, or when there is a strong offshore wind, everyone stays well within their depth.

- Strategies to help manage groups in the surf include:

    - Making clear boundaries using appropriately competent supervisors as a border in the water.  If the supervisors aren't qualified lifeguards then they should always have their feet on the ground, and in shallow enough water so they can help assist participants easily.

    - Splitting participants into smaller ability/age groups, with their designated supervisors in each area

    - Identifying landmarks (large fixed structures such as buildings, trees and lampposts can be more effective than flags or poles) on the shore, instruct participants to stay within the landmarks, and give them a depth limit.

    - Using a buddy system, and encouraging participants to look out for each other, including signs of fatigue, coldness or anxiety

    - Regular headcounts to make sure everyone is accounted for, including before, during and after the activity.

- Communication in the coastal environment can be very difficult. Ensure you have established a clear emergency response signal and emergency response plan, e.g. upon the continuous sounding of a whistle/s, participants/supervisors/leaders to exit the water immediately and gather at the designated meeting spot.

- When there is more than one supervisor, roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined and communicated. This is particularly important when using assistant leaders, accompanying teachers (who are not the activity leader), student leaders or parent helpers.

- When there is a large group, there should be one person who is not directly involved in supervising participants, who provides oversight and/or can step in to assist. This person can step into a direct supervision role if a leader is required to give a

participant 1:1 assistance, or they can to raise the alarm or manage the remaining group members.

- Supervision of larger groups of participants should involve supervision from in the water and from on shore. Having a way to communicate from shore to water is essential, i.e. whistles, hand signals, waving flags, radios.

# While surfing

- Use coloured rash vests to identify your participants from the general public and/or different ability groups

- Surfing activities can potentially take place in deeper water, as the floatation device (surf / boogie board) can help participants return to shore, depending on competency.

- Separate surfers (catching waves towards shore) from other participants, including those who are making their way out from the beach.

- There should be a focus on keeping the group within a suitable distance from the leader/instructor to make sure that if an incident was to occur, the leader/instructor can intervene quickly to reduce further harm. E.g. unable to get onto surfboard or return to the shore due to hitting head, or becoming unconscious at any point.

# In an emergency
## *If things go wrong*

Rescuing participants is incredibly difficult and dangerous to all involved and should only be attempted by competent persons with adequate rescue equipment. Ensure that you are well prepared, and able to:

- Recognise – signs of distress

- Respond – reach the patient, send for help, clear the water

- Rescue – provide floatation and bring patient to shore

- Revive – provide first aid to the rescued person if required

- Flotation devices are crucial to the success of water rescues and survival – ensure that you have appropriate floatation devices on hand

- If someone in the water needs immediate assistance, how quickly can a competent leader or supervisor get to them with flotation?

- It is important there are clear procedures for supervision when one supervisor is required to go and assist a participant who needs help i.e. who supervises the remaining participants on shore?

- Know the location (physical address) of the activity at all times.

- Designate competent individuals to key emergency response roles before any incident occurs, e.g. water rescuer/s; communication person/s to police, school, students; emergency supervision of students away from incident site and hazards.

# Assessing an activity provider's competence

**IN THE SITUATION WHERE AN EXTERNAL OPERATOR IS BEING CONTRACTED TO PROVIDE THE ACTIVITY, IT IS APPROPRIATE TO ASK FOR EVIDENCE OF:**

- The safety management system the operator has for the activities being provided.

- If the activity is covered by the Adventure Activity Regulations, the provider must be registered with WorkSafe as an adventure activity operator.

# Leader competence

*The experience and knowledge required by those running the activity, both for normal operation and for managing emergencies. What competence other assistant leaders should have should also be considered (e.g., where parents or other adults are helping the person running the activity).*

### Skills and knowledge

One of the ways to evaluate competence is to look at the qualifications potential leaders hold. Asking questions of potential leaders and having them provide examples of training or experience as part of their answer allows you to assess their experience and knowledge. It is also appropriate to ask for references to confirm the information they provide.

Additionally, competency includes the currency of the qualification and/or experience at the time of the activity.

**LEADER COMPETENCIES RELEVANT TO ALL THE ACTIVITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS COVERED IN THIS GPG INCLUDE:**

- Understanding of all the activities they plan to run, including hazard and risk identification, challenges involved, and how to deliver these activities for safe and effective participation

- Effective group management skills on the beach, during activity specific time, free time and in an emergency response

- Knowledge of the site/location being used e.g., emergency response procedures, shelter, toilets, safest access points etc.

- Able to access and interpret weather forecast, tidal and water quality information in order to make good decisions based on that information. These decisions include appropriate set-up locations and the suitability of the environment and conditions for that particular group.

- Knowledge of appropriate scanning techniques – see [Surf Lifeguard Training Manual](#) from page 58

- A current first aid qualification.

- Ability to resource and implement emergency response procedures.

**SPECIFIC LEADER COMPETENCIES RELEVANT TO OCEAN AND SURF ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:**

- Good knowledge, judgement and decision making in changing conditions and situations i.e., weather, surf conditions, rip currents, gutter and hole formation

- Competence in the ocean and surf environment – including strong surf, rips, and deep water. Ability to implement an effective emergency response plan  i.e. perform rescues whilst using an effective strategy to maintain safety of others during an emergency situation.

- Effective management of a group in the water during normal activity and emergency response

- Knowledge of suitable equipment and clothing for participants and leaders i.e., warm clothing/wetsuits, sunscreen; and what to do with faulty equipment i.e., damaged surfboards and rescue tubes

- In addition to a current first aid qualification, specific knowledge of drowning, cold water shock, hypothermia and CPR.

## Relevant qualifications

The following qualifications are relative to all of the activities:

- A first aid certificate

The following qualifications are relative (but not limited to) the water activities:

- A life-saving qualification such as the Bronze Star or Bronze Medallion.

- Surf Live Saving NZ's Surf Lifeguard Award.

- International Surfing Association Level 1 Surf Instructors Award.



*"Competent leaders are one of the mainstays of ensuring safety"*

# Resources and equipment

*Consider what equipment and resources are required to run the activity safely. The participants may be required to bring this, or it may be provided to them.*

## Participant
*What each participant would need to bring to the activity.*

- Clothing and footwear appropriate for the activity and conditions i.e., swimwear and rash tops and/or wetsuits (to provide warmth, padding, buoyancy, sun protection). Clothing likely to become heavy or limit movement when wet is not appropriate.

- Personal sun protection – clothing, hat, sunscreen (and/or warm hat - depending on the time of year and weather conditions)

- Any personal medication that could be needed during the activity i.e., EpiPen, asthma inhaler. This should be readily accessible and may be carried by the Leader who should understand the participant's requirements.

- Warm clothes for after the activity

- It is recommended that all boards used for beginner sessions have 'soft core', skin and fins, and leashes (leg or wrist as appropriate) are used.

## Leader
*Equipment that should be carried by each leader or that they should have easy access to.*

- Brightly coloured rash vest, or other easily identifiable clothing

- Personal sun protection – clothing, hat, sunscreen (and/or warm hat - depending on the time of year and weather conditions)

- A whistle, or some other way of attracting attention, i.e. airhorn.

## Group equipment
*Equipment that should be readily accessible to the activity or group leader throughout any surf-based session:*

- Participant roll count, medical list and personal medications

- Cones and flag markers to mark areas for containing participants. Flags can be used as markers on the beach to keep in line with whilst in water (however large landmarks may be more effective if available).

- First aid kit (including spare sun protective equipment)

- Appropriate communication device (mobile phone, radio), and emergency contact list - to immediately seek assistance in the event of an incident

- Rescue equipment i.e., rescue tube/s, fins or rescue board (surf lessons could have a demo board which can be used as a rescue board)

- Spare warm clothing - especially where participants are likely to get wet and cold.

- Hot drink and food

- Means of providing shelter - if weather conditions are cold, windy and wet; or if hot and sunny, a way to create shade i.e., a gazebo or flysheet.

# Further support

*Places to gain more information from, e.g. specialist websites, industry bodies or clubs.*

Surf Lifesaving NZ - https://www.surflifesaving.org.nz/

Surf Lifeguard Training Manual 2019

Water Safety New Zealand – how to identify rips

Water Safety New Zealand – how to be beach safe

International Surfing Association - https://isasurf.org

# Beach and Surf Activities Planning Template

# Overarching Risk Management Guidance