

SHARKSMART

Safety tips for swimmers, surfers, divers,
snorkelers and spearfishers



Know the risks and
reduce your chances
of a close encounter
with a shark at
NSW beaches and estuaries



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Sharks live in healthy oceans

Sharks are a natural part of healthy oceanic and estuarine environments. When people enter open water, they are entering the shark's domain.

Shark attacks are rare events. Millions of us swim in oceans, harbours, coastal rivers and lakes each year, with just a handful of attacks. The only way to completely rule out a close encounter with a shark is to swim in a pool or other enclosure, or to stay on the shore!

However, a better awareness and understanding of sharks and their behaviour can help everyone to safely enjoy water sports, particularly younger people and tourists, as well as surfers and divers who choose to swim outside patrolled areas.

Shark meshing in NSW

The Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program helps provide a safer environment for swimmers and surfers and has proven effective in greatly reducing the number of shark attacks.

The program sees specially designed nets placed along 51 high-use beaches from Newcastle to Wollongong from 1 September to 30 April. The nets deter sharks from establishing territories—reducing the odds of an encounter. They are not meant to form a physical barrier.

There has only been one fatal attack on a netted beach since 1937 but there are no 100% guarantees against a shark attack.

While committed to the program, the NSW Government is conscious of the potential impact nets have on other marine life. Specialist contractors free any non-target sharks or other marine life caught where it is practical and safe to do so. Nets are not set during the majority of the whale migration season. When nets are set, special sound devices are used to deter dolphins and whales.




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SharkSmart swimmers and surfers

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- Swim at a patrolled beach, between the flags—lifesavers and lifeguards are there to monitor risks and maximise swimmer safety
 - Tell an on-duty lifesaver or lifeguard if a shark is spotted near swimmers or surfers
 - Leave the water if a shark is spotted or alarm is sounded
 - Don't swim too far from shore
 - Swim in groups
 - Avoid surfing alone
 - Avoid swimming and surfing when it's dark or during twilight hours
 - Avoid murky water and waters with known effluents or sewage
 - Avoid areas used by recreational or commercial fishers
 - Do not swim/surf near or interfere with shark nets
 - Avoid areas with signs of baitfish or fish feeding activity—watch for diving seabirds
 - Do not rely on dolphins to indicate the absence of sharks—they often feed together
 - Avoid having pets in the water with you
 - Be aware that sharks may be present between sandbars or near steep drop offs
 - Avoid swimming in canals, and swimming or surfing in river/harbour mouths

SharkSmart divers, snorkelers and spearfishers

- Find out about the kinds of sharks you might encounter and what behaviour to expect from them
- Realise diver safety becomes increasingly difficult with decreasing visibility at night or in turbid water, and with increasing depth and current
- Discuss dive logistics and contingency plans such as hand signals, entry and exit considerations and separation procedures with your dive partner before you enter the water
- Be aware that using bait to lure fish may attract sharks
- Don't chase, grab, corner, spear or touch a shark
- Don't use bait or attempt to feed sharks—feeding may radically change behaviour and lure other sharks
- Be aware of the behaviour of fish—if they suddenly seek cover or appear agitated, leave the water as quickly and quietly as possible
- Don't attach a speared fish to your body or keep them near you—use a float and line to keep your catch away

