



Covid-19 Q+A: What will summer at the beach look like?

Q: What does lifeguarding look like in a COVID impacted environment?

A: Like many things in New Zealand, lifeguard patrol activity is subject to COVID alert level restrictions. Surf Life Saving New Zealand continues to work with the Government on what services they can provide to the public at each level.

The official patrol season for lifeguards will start on Labour Weekend (24 October), however, most surf clubs are putting on a form of patrol that is compliant with lockdown restrictions.

While patrols will cease in a lockdown level 4 scenario, our Search and Rescue squads are on standby 24/7 to respond to incidents in all levels, just call 111 in case of emergency.

For the public, the recognisable yellow and red flags may not be present as clubs may only be operating an Observational Patrol. This is because lifeguards may not have the capacity to run a full flagged patrol. If the conditions are too dangerous for the public and lifeguards, there may be a 'red flag' beach, which means 'NO SWIMMING'.

For the lifeguards, patrolling will be quite a different experience, as opposed to the close-knit collegial environment of a 'normal patrol'. Social distancing and bubble requirements will mean there is no overnight stays at surf clubs and any work within patrolling teams will be done at safe distances.

Q: Will swimming between the flags be a little different now that there's a 2m distance rule?

A: The way lifeguards use flags during COVID Alert Level 3 will be very different. At Alert Level 3 clubs may only operate an Observational Patrol and will only be using flags if they need to. This is why members of the public need to be extremely cautious when entering the water – now more than ever.

Lifeguards use the flags as a means to mark the safest place for people to swim in a patrolled setting. If flags are present at beaches, social distancing is still recommended and swimming numbers may be restricted to ensure this is carried out safely in the water this summer.

Q: What's the best way to find lifeguard patrolled beaches?

A: Currently our lifeguards are operating emergency rescue call-outs only. However from Labour Weekend onwards patrols will begin. The best way to stay up to date with lifeguard activity in the Northern Region is to visit safeswim.org.nz.



Q: How do lifeguards keep themselves and others safe while patrolling?

A: Lifeguard safety is a number one priority, alongside ensuring we keep our public safe on the coastline. While performing rescues or completing patrol duties in Alert Level 3, lifeguards must wear a mask at all times, where social distancing is not an option, including when they are in the water.

To ensure there is no risk of spreading the virus among volunteers, patrol operations have been reconfigured to a COVID-19 impacted environment, and hygiene practices and protocols are in place. Lifeguards will be operating in limited numbers to perform rescues and patrols. Club houses will be in use by lifeguards only and public contact will be limited.

Q: Are all lifeguards vaccinated?

A: Surf Life Saving strongly recommends that all members are fully vaccinated before carrying out any club activities. As we've seen the COVID-19 situation is complex and constantly changing, and now the Government has officially mandated vaccines for health and education workers.

While training and patrolling activities carried out by lifeguards is now provided under the Health Response Act 2020, Surf Life Saving New Zealand is working with the Government and other organisations to understand whether club members are also required to be vaccinated under this law.

In the meantime the movement is putting in place the necessary processes to ensure that Paid Lifeguards, Beach Education Instructors and Search and Rescue Members can follow Government vaccination guidelines set up for frontline first aid and education workers.

While initial steps have been taken to prepare clubs for the impact of vaccination mandates on club activity, the situation around vaccinations is continually being monitored by Surf Life Saving and policies updated accordingly to ensure public safety.

Q: How should I approach lifeguards if I have questions, queries or emergencies?

A: Please do continue to approach lifeguards and engage with them at the beach. Much like you would when seeking help in the supermarket from supermarket staff, approach lifeguards but ensure you keep a 2-metre distance and wear a mask if possible if wanting to talk with lifeguards or when reporting emergencies to lifeguards in person.

If a lifeguard is not present or available dial 111 and ask for Police to report a water emergency and activate our emergency lifeguard services.



Q: Do I have to wear my mask at the beach?

A: While wearing a mask isn't mandatory when performing exercise and outdoor recreational activities, wearing a face covering and keeping a 2-metre distance from others is encouraged when leaving home.

Q: Do lifeguards wear masks in the water?

A: Where practical lifeguards will wear masks when performing emergency rescues in and off the water such as an IRB, or Rescue Water Craft (jet-ski) however at times it is not practical. We will work to minimise these occurrences in all instances.

Q: Can I use my COVID tracer app at the beach, are there QR codes to scan at most locations?

A: There are QR codes at most reserves around New Zealand, if there is no QR code at the beach or surf club you visit it's possible to manually enter your location details into the app.

Q: What if the beach I'm at doesn't have reception, how do I use my COVID app or alert authorities if there's an emergency?

A: We don't recommend travelling to remote locations during high alert levels and encourage people to take extra precautions when planning recreational activities for their own safety and those of our volunteers. Please don't overestimate your abilities and if in doubt stay out of the water. In case of emergencies dial 111 immediately and ask for lifeguard emergency services.

Q: I want to enjoy the beach without being exposed to too many people. Is there a way I can find out how busy a beach is before visiting?

A: It's important to keep a 2m distance from people you don't know to prevent further spread of COVID. If you can't practice social distancing at the beach we'd recommend finding another suitable beach via the Safeswim website or app – [Safeswim.org.nz](https://safeswim.org.nz).