
Fishing - preventing injury

Summary

- Never go fishing alone – always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people.
 - Let somebody know the location of your fishing trip, who you are going with and an approximate time you will be back. Carry a charged mobile phone on you at all times.
 - Stop fishing immediately if an injury occurs and seek prompt medical treatment.
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Fishing is an enjoyable recreational activity that has a low risk of injury. Most fishing injuries are due to cutting or piercing objects, or falls. Fishing hooks and rods can be dangerous if not handled with care, and there is a risk of lead poisoning for anglers who make their own lead sinkers. Drowning and accidents are a risk when rock and ledge fishing, boat fishing or surf fishing.

Fishing has the highest participation rate of any recreational or sporting activity in Australia. It can be enjoyed by people of all ages and fitness levels.

Compared with other recreational activities, most fishing injuries are not serious. However, each year an average of 20 people drown while fishing in Australia. Rock and ledge fishing is particularly dangerous. In New South Wales, 74 people died in rock fishing accidents between 1992 and 2000.

Transport Safety Victoria has a range of information about the lessons learnt from maritime incidents.

Stay safe while fishing

Some general safety suggestions to keep in mind while fishing include:

- Never go fishing alone. Always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people. If one person is injured or in danger, a second person can stay with them while the third person seeks help. This is especially important when rock fishing.
- Let somebody know the location of your fishing trip, who you are going with and an approximate time you will be back.
- Carry a charged mobile phone with you at all times.
- Wear non-slip shoes and take care to avoid slipping or cutting yourself on sharp, rocky edges.
- Wear lightweight garments worn in layers. Bulky woollen jumpers become extremely heavy and difficult to remove if you fall in the water.
- Carry a first aid kit with you.
- Be SunSmart. Wear sun protective clothing, use SPF30+ (or higher) sunscreen and lip balm, wear an appropriate hat, seek shade where possible and wear sunglasses.
- Take adequate drinking water.

Alcohol and fishing

Avoid drinking alcohol while fishing. Alcohol can impair your judgment. It also seriously affects your chances of survival if you fall in the water.

Life jackets and fishing

A life jacket can save your life if you fall into the water, whether you are on a boat or near the water. It is extremely difficult to put on a life jacket when an emergency occurs or when you are in the water. It is safer to wear a life jacket at all times, before any emergency occurs.

In Victoria, life jackets or personal flotation devices are compulsory on:

- powerboats up to 4.8 metres long
- off-the-beach sailing yachts
- personal watercraft
- canoes, kayaks and rowing boats
- pedal boats and fun boats
- kiteboards and sailboards
- recreational tenders.

Children under the age of 10 must wear a specified personal flotation device at all times on any vessel.

Wear a life jacket when fishing off rocks, ledges, a riverbank or a boat. Make sure a life jacket is available for each person, including children, and that they are worn at all times while in or near the water.

Use and store fishing equipment safely

Take care when using and storing fishing equipment to avoid the risk of injury. Fishing hooks and rods can be dangerous if not handled with care. Lead sinkers can be a risk to you and your family's health and to the environment.

Some suggestions include:

- Make sure the hook is secure and hold the rod parallel to the ground when you carry your fishing rod.
- Cover or remove fish hooks from fishing rods before transporting. Exposed hooks on rods should be corked or placed in a hook safety cover.
- Fish at least 10 metres away from the person next to you.
- Check there isn't anyone behind you when you cast.
- Instruct beginners and children on safe rod and hook procedures.
- Take care if you make your own lead sinkers. Melting, grinding, sanding or swallowing lead can be dangerous. Young children and pregnant women are especially at risk. Follow safety precautions for handling and storing lead products and don't work with lead in or around your home. Consider using non-lead alternatives.

Weather and fishing

Staying aware of weather conditions is an important part of fishing safety. Make sure you have the most up-to-date local weather information available and be prepared for sudden changes. For coastal locations, take particular note of unexpected tide and swell conditions.

Rock fishing

Rock fishing is a dangerous activity. Many fishing fatalities occur while people are rock fishing. Some safety suggestions include:

- Make sure you have a thorough understanding of the area where you are fishing, including the tidal behaviour, accessibility to the area and an escape plan. If the swell threatens where you are standing, leave immediately.
- Fish in a group of at least three people and always stay in sight of each other. Never fish by yourself. If one person is washed into the sea, another person can stay and assist while the third person gets help.
- Learn to swim if you can't swim. Classes are available for adults as well as children.
- Wear a life jacket or buoyancy vest.
- Never wear waders when rock fishing. These can quickly become heavy if you fall in the water.
- Look for secure footholds and stay away from sloping, slippery edges.
- Obey all danger signs.
- Do not turn your back on the sea.

Surf fishing

- Learn how to read the surf and how to identify and avoid rips before you begin surf fishing.
- Do not enter rips to fish.
- Go to gentle sloping beaches with a non-threatening wave pattern – these are ideal for safe surf fishing.

Boat fishing

- Plan carefully before going out on the water. Make sure all your safety equipment, including a radio, is in good working order before you go out in the water. Also check fuel levels before you leave.
- Have your motor and boat serviced regularly.
- Update your boating knowledge regularly and practise your skills.

If you fall in the water or an injury occurs

- Do not feel for the bottom with your feet. Underwater rocks, tree trunks and debris are less likely to snare your trailing hands. Try to steer towards a clear bank feeling for the bottom with your hands.
- Stop fishing immediately if an injury occurs and seek prompt medical treatment.
- Always carry a charged mobile phone with you in case of emergency.

Where to get help

- Smartplay Tel. **(03) 9674 8777**
- Transport Safety Victoria Tel. **1800 223 022**
- Your local swimming pool for lessons
- Department of Human Services, Environmental Health Unit Tel. **1300 761 874**

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