

Surfing: Safety Activity Checkpoints

High Risk



Surfing (also referred to as “surfboarding”) is one of the most challenging water sports, but if a new surfer is well prepared, it can be a safe, rewarding experience that develops balance, agility, strength and confidence. With proper instruction from an experienced surfing instructor, many first-timers are able to stand up on their boards during the initial two- to four-hour session. While people learn at different paces, three to four lessons are recommended for beginners. Enrolling girls in a surf camp or daylong surfboarding lesson is highly recommended for beginners, and be sure to inform the surf school of girls’ ages, heights, and sizes to reserve appropriate surfboards and wetsuits. **Surfing is not allowed for Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies.**

Know where to surf. The ocean is best, but some rivers and regions along the Great Lakes also can be suitable for surfing so long as the weather is warm. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with abilities. Communicate with girls and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [Disabled Sports USA](#) and the [Association of Amputee Surfers](#) provide to people with disabilities.

Surfing Gear

Required Gear

- Surfboard (soft-deck longboards are generally recommended for beginners)
- At least one graspable and throwable personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) is immediately available for each group on the water
- Leash (also referred to as a leg rope; a cord that attaches the surfboard to the surfer’s ankle, so that she doesn’t have to swim too far to catch up to the board after a wipeout; a leash is usually included with a rental surfboard)

Recommended Gear

- One-piece bathing suit (less cumbersome in the waves than a two-piece)
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15), apply every two hours
- Goggles for girls who require glasses or contact lenses (available at sporting-goods stores; if prescription goggles are too expensive for girls to purchase, make sure girls test non-prescription goggles to assure proper fit over prescriptive eyewear)
- Beach towel

- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after surfing
- Wetsuit is recommended for warmth and skin protection, especially when water temperature is below 70 degrees Fahrenheit (most surf schools rent full-body or partial suits)
- Wax, which is applied to the top or deck of a surfboard for traction (most rental surfboards will be pre-waxed)

Prepare for Surfing

- **Communicate with council and parents.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- **Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.
- **Ensure participants are able to swim.** Participants' swimming abilities are classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, etc.) at council-approved sites, or participants provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a swim test is conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.
- **Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints for the recommended adult-to-girl ratios.
- **Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Instructors should hold a certification from the [National Surf Schools and Instructors Association](#), the [International Surfing Association](#), or similar certification. Ocean lifeguard certifications are also recommended. The instructor-to-girl ratio is 1 to 4.

NOTE: The instructor-to-participant ratio is NOT the same as the adult-to-girl ratio that is found in the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints. Both ratios MUST be complied with when girls are participating in surfing. For example, if there are 15 Juniors participating in surfing, there must be 4 instructors plus 2 adult Girl Scout volunteers (who are not instructors).

- **Compile key contacts.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- **Pick an ability-appropriate site.** Make sure the surfing location complements the surfers' ability levels. Some beaches designate areas for beginners, intermediate surfers, and higher-level surfers. If the surfing location does not designate areas by skill level, verify with the surfing instructor that the location is appropriate for the girls.
- **Select a safe location with a soft, sandy, or muddy bottom.** Scout out a location that does not have a sharp-edged or rocky bottom, which can be dangerous and can cut feet and limbs. The launching area should be easily accessible and clear of overhead power lines.
- **Safeguard valuables.** Don't leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place. If working with a surfboarding school or camp, call ahead to inquire about the company's storage amenities.
- **Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in First Aid, including Adult and Child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of near-drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with Wilderness First Aid. See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.

On the Day of Surfing

- **Get a weather and tide report.** Never surf on a stormy day. Following rainy weather, check the water quality before surfing. On the morning of the surf trip, determine whether conditions will be appropriate for surfing by searching for regional surf reports on [www.surfline.com](#), [www.freetidetables.com](#), [www.17ft.com](#), and [weather.com](#). If weather conditions prevent the surf trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternate activity.

- **Assess wave heights.** Call the surf instructor on the day of the trip to confirm that wave heights are appropriate for girls. Wave heights rely heavily on wind strengths; two- to three-foot waves are recommended for beginners. When waves surpass five feet, it can be difficult to paddle out from the shore.
- **Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning.** Exit water immediately and take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them.
- **Use the buddy system.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.

Surfing Links

Surfline Glossary of Terms: www.surfline.com/surfology/surfology_glossary_index.cfm

Surfing Handbook: Tips for beginners and intermediate surfers, plus overviews on ocean safety and gear - www.surfinghandbook.com

International Surfing Association: <https://www.isasurf.org>

Surfing Know-How for Girls

Know how to steer out from the shore. When lying on boards and paddling from the shore and deeper into the water, keep the nose of the surfboard pointed toward the surf, in order to cut through the waves. Being positioned sideways opens up the possibility of getting caught by a wave and tumbled around.

Know the break line. When paddling out from the shore, go around the break line (the point at which waves begin to break) and not through it. This allows other surfers plenty of space.

Share the waves. Stay out of the way of other surfers, and never take off on a wave in front of another surfer (called “snaking”).

Hold on to the surfboard. It’s dangerous to other surfers and swimmers to let go of surfboards (all the more reason to use a leash).

***These checkpoints must be reviewed with the vendor and/or facility, when appropriate.**