



## Snorkeling

**Council Approval:** Required

High Risk

Tier 2

**Activity Permitted For:** J C S A

### About Snorkeling

Snorkeling is a great way to explore underwater life without the complicated equipment required of scuba diving. It's important to learn how to breathe properly using snorkels and to receive instruction from an experienced snorkeler or equipment-rental facility.

Coral, an ecosystem of shell and marine life, is a popular attraction for snorkelers and must be respected. As ocean organisms that support plants and fish, coral reefs are an essential part of the underwater ecosystem. Unfortunately, the coral reef is threatened by climate change, ocean acidification, and people who mistreat it. Touching coral can harm the delicate outer layer, which may take up to 100 years to recover.

It's important to know where to snorkel: just about any body of water is appropriate, but snorkeling is most recommended in warm ocean water with minimal waves or current.

#### Learn More:

- [National Association of Underwater Instructors](#)
- [Professional Association of Diving Instructors](#)
- [Snorkeling info](#)

### Include Girls with Disabilities

Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn about the resources and information that the [National Instructors Association for Divers with Disabilities](#) provides people with.

### Safety Activity Checkpoints

**Ensure participants are able to swim.** Participants' swimming abilities need to be classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, etc.) at council-approved sites, or participants can provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a [swim test](#) should be conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.

**Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Ensure the snorkeling instructor holds instructional certification from Scuba Schools International (SSI) or the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), or has equivalent certification or documented experience according to your council's guidelines.

**Verify certified lifeguard is present.** If the scuba instructor is not also a certified lifeguard, you will need a lifeguard present. Lifeguards need current ARC Lifeguarding with

Waterfront Module or YMCA Waterfront Lifeguarding Certification, or the equivalent. You need one certified lifeguard for every 25 swimmers. The primary guard must be an adult (age 18). Secondary guards can be 16 years old.

**Size up snorkeling gear.** Ensure the appropriate sizes of masks, snorkels, and fins are available, and make sure that masks fit girls' faces securely and comfortably. An air space is needed in front of the eyes in order to see properly underwater. Also keep in mind that objects viewed underwater while wearing a mask appear about 25 percent larger and closer than objects seen through a mask out of water.

**Safeguard valuables.** Don't leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place. If working with a snorkeling school, inquire about the company's storage amenities.

**Prepare for emergencies.** An adult with rescue experience and/or certification must be present. If snorkeling from a boat, at least one adult should have small-craft safety certification or equivalent experience. (Both of these qualifications can be held by one person.)

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.

**Get a weather and wind report.** Never snorkel on a stormy or extremely windy day; strong winds and large waves decrease visibility and make swimming difficult. On the day of the snorkeling trip or lesson, check [Weather.com](http://Weather.com), or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate. If weather conditions prevent the snorkeling activity, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.

**Use the buddy system.** See "Introduction to *Safety Activity Checkpoints 2019*."

**Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning.** Exit water immediately, and head to shore. 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.

## Safety and Required Gear

- **Wearable flotation device:** Consult with your instructor to evaluate whether participants should wear a flotation device such as a simple waist belt or snorkeling vest. Water currents or surge, visibility, and participants' swimming ability should be considered. If life jackets are recommended by the instructor, then use [U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets](#) (Type III recommended) that fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure they're in good condition with no tears.
- **Snorkel**
- **Mask**
- **Emergency flotation device:** At least one graspable and throwable Coast-Guard approved personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) needs to be immediately available