

The Elbe can be deadly at low tide — for everyone on the beach

The Elbe is a tidal river and the water level at high water is around 3.5 meters higher than at low water. At high tide, a lot of water covers the beach. At low tide, the water retreats quite far and the tall stone walls along the beach (groynes) emerge.

Low water High water

What makes it so dangerous?

1. Underwater drop-off

At low tide, there is a steep, 17-meter-long slope down to the shipping channel directly at the water's edge. It is impossible to see underwater and twice as steep at the street Waseberg.

If you take just a few steps into the water at **low tide**, you will unexpectedly slip down this steep slope. The bottom is muddy and slick, making it impossible to regain your footing and get back to the beach.

The current and vortexes can carry you away and smash you against the rocks of the groynes. People die this way every year — including people on the beach who never planned to go swimming.

Never let children play at the water's edge at low tide!

2. Powerful current and vortexes

The Elbe flows at up to 7 km/h. This is faster than a person can walk.

Anyone in the water at low tide is immediately swept out into the shipping channel and carried along so quickly that their friends on shore can't keep up. There are powerful vortexes at the groynes that can pull even strong swimmers deep under water for long periods. The trained divers of the DLRG (German Life Saving Association) use mountain climbing gear to secure themselves in these areas.

If you are caught in a vortex, there is very little chance that you'll return to the surface of the water alive.

Never try to retrieve something that has fallen into the Elbe (balls etc.) at low tide!

3. Jumping off wrecks, groynes and navigation marks

The water is usually very shallow at the beach and the bottom is very rocky. There are also extremely sharp edges and corners on the wrecks that are likely to injure you.

If you jump or dive off a navigation mark, groyne or wreck, you won't be able to see how deep the water is below you. The shallow water will not break your fall and you can severely injure yourself on the bottom.

There is then a huge risk of being helplessly swept away by the powerful current.

Never jump or dive into the water off a wreck, groyne or navigation mark!

4. The undertow and surge caused by ships

The Elbe is a shipway. The large ships first suck the water away from shore, pulling everything in it out into the river — balls, floats, swimmers.

The returning wave then comes in at full force, sweeping high and quickly along the beach. And just when you least expect it — usually once the ship is long past.

This surge is very dangerous on the groynes and can smash you hard against the rocks.

Always pay attention to ships and the undertow and surge they create!

Some safety tips:

There are a few rules that can make swimming in the Elbe safer. Some apply everywhere, while others are especially important for the Elbe River.

- You should never go into the water if you can't swim
- Always maintain a safe distance from the water's edge on the beach at low tide
- If you do wade or swim, only do so at high tide and stay between the groynes
- Children should only wade or swim within arm's reach of their parents
- Never jump or dive into unknown water or from a wreck, groyne or navigation mark
- Pay attention to friends and others on the beach; talk to them or call for help if you see unsafe behaviour (phone 112, information signs on the beach)
- Share these rules with your friends, kids at school, parents and anyone else you know
- Everyone should learn to swim — it is a lifesaving skill, and not just here, but around any body of water.

There is always a risk. Following these guidelines can make having fun by the river safer. Everyone should ensure their own safety and that of other swimmers — take responsibility!

Swimming and wading in the Elbe is dangerous and can be deadly at low tide.

Kommentiert [SVSCI]: Hier würde ich gerne „Never jump into the Elbe to try and save someone. Call for help and keep your eye on the person from the shore.“ hinzufügen.