

Guidelines on how to behave when diving with sharks

Have the right attitude !



Sharks Mission

FRANCE



Man has always been fascinated by big predators.

When we enter the water, we enter an environment that is not ours, we enter the territory of marine life and its predators.

The unexpected encounter with a shark, exceeds in every way those we can have with land based predators whose territory we share.

It is therefore required that we are extremely vigilant, humble and aware of such a presence, without ever forgetting the risks and the rules of well behavior and personal security.

The ocean and its resident sharks and other wildlife, remain unpredictable. Even though these guidelines are useful and valuable, they will never give absolute guarantees.



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The 12 SMF recommendations for a safe dive



① CHECK YOUR DIVE GUIDE'S KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge of the dive site and the species that can be encountered, depending on the season.

② PLAN YOUR DIVE

Bad visibility, currents, depth, your equipment (camera for instance) can change your safety while diving.

Inform yourself on the frequency, numbers and species of sharks encountered at the dive site.

For example : Avoid sudden and uncoordinated moves. Avoid being scared because the shark will notice that. Keep the shark in sight, eye to eye contact to show you are aware of his presence. Getting closer to your buddy will ensure 4 eyes to keep track of him. Keep upright, arms close and legs in length of the body if possible.

③ ADOPT THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

If you are diving with sharks, enter the water calmly, without making too much noise. An overly spectacular entrance may excite the sharks and make them dangerous. Always regard yourself as a visitor in the sharks' territory and behave accordingly. You can let the shark come close to inspect and **"accept"** you.

④ ALWAYS KEEP EYE CONTACT

A shark is aware of your presence, even before you can spot it. Once you have spotted the shark, it has decided to inspect the intruder. They are curious and intelligent animals. You have to be alert in their presence, since they have no or little natural enemies.

A shark is very smart and when you look one in the eyes it will know you have seen and recognized it. Never let it out of sight and stay alert even after its departure



5 BE CAUTIOUS WITH YOUR MOVEMENTS

When possible, position yourself close to the bottom or against a wall, vertically, arms and hands in line with your body. Stay calm and breath normal. Try to adapt to the environment and observe the surroundings. Don't make any sudden, brutal moves, that might frighten the sharks and make them nervous and might even lead to a defensive "attack" from them.

Be alert of their movements too, keep the sharks in sight at all times, scan your environment constantly, in all directions and beneath you while ascending.

6 DO NOT TOUCH, GRIP ONTO OR HOLD BACK A SHARK

A simple contact might be interpreted as an attack from your side and might result in a defensive and potentially dangerous reaction from the shark's part.

Never try to catch a shark with a rope or anything else since a trapped shark might attack his aggressors and all other divers in its proximity. During his struggle, the shark will show stress and might be seen as prey by other sharks in the neighborhood.

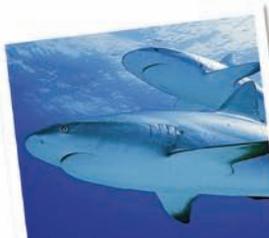
7 NEVER BLOCK THE WAY IN FRONT OF THE SHARK

When you position yourself in front of it, the shark might see that as a confrontation. Sharks are unable to swim backwards and you will add extra stress upon the shark by forcing it to change directions.

8 DO NOT FEED SHARKS UNDERWATER

The use of bait in form of blood or fish parts is to be avoided. The sharks' behavior changes immediately, they tend to get nervous and exited and it may put them into a context where they are competitors amongst each other. The use of bait in a popular dive area might put all divers in a wide range in danger. The use of bait is forbidden in lots of countries, for example in Egypt.

Where it is allowed, it is necessary to obtain a special permit. For divers / spear fishers : do not keep your catch on your belt.



9 DO NOT GET ISOLATED

Sharks seem to perceive a group of divers as a gigantic, frightening organism. Remember to stay in group, close to your buddy, without making sudden moves and pay attention to the sharks around you. Some sharks have the tendency to isolate a diver from the group due to their behavior, the oceanic white tip shark for example shows this kind of behavior.

Never behave like prey that is trying to escape, always stay in front of the shark but neither behave like an aggressor.

Master your fears, think about these guidelines, as the sharks will detect your fear, he instinctively recognizes that and might use it (*of course we know that this is easier said than done*)

In case of danger, let your octopus blow (the continuous bubbles will disrupt the shark's lateral line), get back to back with your buddy and move away from the shark together or make your way back to the boat. Use your camera, snorkel, ... to keep the shark at distance in case he is coming too close.

10 WHAT IF A SHARK SHOWS INTEREST IN YOU ?

Make sure you always stay in eye contact with the shark and follow its movements (*rotate to always be eye to eye with it*)

If a shark swims up to you directly and he is within touching distance , guide it away by touching its nose or the top of its head.

If the shark keeps coming closer, pat or pinch the end of its snout with your hands vertically, but be very careful, if you miss, you risk that your hand ends up between its teeth. You can also use your camera.

In case the shark seems to bite you, place your hand in its gills which are very sensitive or press your fingers in the eyes, the shark hates that and will try to escape.

Normally a shark circles its prey, makes contact and pushes it with its snout. He makes precise movements to determine the quality of its potential prey (if it's your first time to dive with sharks you might misinterpret these movements) but it is very rare that a shark attacks directly. This is why it is important for divers to behave in the right way. These guidelines might come in useful.



11 Watch the sharks behavior very closely

If sharks are nervous, make disorderly strange movements, if their dorsal fins point down, if they change directions suddenly and brutally, if their tail swishes nervously and their muscles are tense **LEAVE THE WATER QUICKLY**

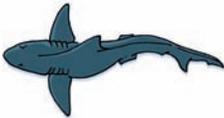
Normal behavior



From the side



From the face



From the top

Aggressive behavior



In case you are not able to leave the water, get further away from the sharks calmly, this might calm them down giving you the chance to leave the water. Prefer moving in 8 -10 meters depth than in 2 or 3.

12 IN CASE YOU HAVE TO COME UP IN THE PRESENCE OF SHARKS

Always move without sudden movements, keep calm. Do not lose sight of the sharks. Use a "tool" to keep the sharks at distance if necessary : **camera, snorkel, ...**

Go directly to the boat or place of exit.

Don't swim at the surface for a long time, you risk getting exhausted and getting attacked by a shark coming from beneath or behind you.

If possible stay close to your buddy or group for all these maneuvers. Once you reach the boat, dock or beach, get out of the water quickly, but without rushing because that might revoke the sharks' curiosity and its predatory instinct.



A few more tips

- *Wear a complete wetsuit, this will protect you in case of contact.*
- *Avoid bright colors, especially yellow, as certain species are attracted to those colors.*
- *Don't wear glittering objects, these attract them.*
- *Do not swim at dusk or at dawn because that is when sharks come closer to shore to hunt.*
- *Never dive solo, nor in murky waters, or when having a bleeding injury and avoid night dives.*
- *Avoid flashlights of cameras when sharks are around as the magnetic field might attract them.*
- *Do not swim near seals, they are the preferred meal of great white sharks.*
- *If you spearfish, never keep your catch on your belt.*

These guidelines are not comprehensive and even though they have been reviewed, they are not absolute rules, sharks remain wild animals and potentially unpredictable, in a territory that is not ours but theirs. Keep your humility and show respect for these kings of the oceans and enjoy the moments with sharks. In most cases, these encounters are magical and peaceful if we adapt the right attitude and behavior.

Happy diving !

Fabienne Rossier
Présidente de SMF



SMF cannot be held responsible in case a shark incident (while diving or other) even in case these guidelines have been followed.

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FRANCE



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