



Personal flotation devices (PFDs) include standard lifejackets, inflatable lifejackets, and buoyancy vests. All must be fitted properly to aid flotation. A lifejacket will enable you to float with your head out of the water and may help to keep you warm in cold water. However, one that is too big or not worn properly may be lost in heavy seas or in rapids.

Different types of lifejackets and flotation

Today standard lifejackets and buoyancy vests are made of closed cell foam. However, recently inflatable lifejackets have become popular. All three types of lifejackets float you slightly differently. A lifejacket is designed to support the person in a slightly inclined, backwards from vertical position to keep the water away from the nose and mouth. The wearer of a buoyancy vest will float more vertically and have little support for the head. The centre of buoyancy is lower for a person in a buoyancy vest compared with one in a standard lifejacket.

There are two types of inflatable jackets; manual or self-inflating upon entry to water. The manual jackets are not active (will not offer flotation) until the tab is pulled to inflate them. These jackets will work only once as the gas canister will need replacing after use. Once an inflatable lifejacket is inflated the wearer may find it difficult to swim on their front as the support will keep them inclined on their back freeing their nose and mouth from the water.

Characteristics of a lifejacket



Graphic courtesy of Hutchwilco

Fitting a lifejacket (on land)

- Check the size suits your body weight
- Put on and zip, clip and tighten the buckles
- Get your buddy to lift the lifejacket at your shoulders. If it rides up above your chin then it needs tightening

Fitting a lifejacket (in water)

- Open out the life jacket (inside upper most) as it floats on the water
- Orientate the jacket and lie on the back section, your head by the collar
- Rotate onto your back and simultaneously put your dominant arm through the correct armhole
- Using the dominant hand to grab the other side of the life jacket push other arm through the empty arm hole
- Remain on your back and bring both sides of the jacket together, zip, clip and tighten the buckles

Lifejacket facts

- Lifejackets saves lives. On average there are 20 recreational boating fatalities every year in New Zealand; two thirds (13) could have been prevented if the persons had worn a lifejacket. In 2015 there were 27 fatalities, 18 of which could have been avoided by wearing a lifejacket. (Maritime NZ).
- New Zealand Maritime Rules require that as a skipper, you must carry a correctly sized lifejacket for each person on board.
- This is a legal requirement that applies to all boats, including tenders and larger craft.
- Maritime rules provide that it is the skipper's legal responsibility to ensure that lifejackets are worn in situations of heightened risk, such as when crossing a bar, in rough water, during an emergency, and by non-swimmers.
- If they are not worn, lifejackets must be stored so that they are immediately available in case of an emergency.
- Regional council bylaws go further than maritime rules. Check your local regional council bylaws for the requirements that apply in the waters in your part of New Zealand.
- The **Auckland Council Navigation Safety Bylaw 2014** requires:
 - Wearing of personal flotation devices on small recreational vessels six metres or less
 - Every person on board a small recreational vessel must wear a properly secured personal flotation device of an appropriate size for that person at all times.
- Subclause (1) does not apply if the person in charge of the vessel, after assessing all circumstances and determining there would be no reduction in safety, expressly authorises any person on board to remove a personal flotation device.

Lifejacket recommendations

- Children under 12, non-swimmers and the elderly should wear a lifejacket at all times
- It is recommended that everyone on board a small boat under 6 metres in length, wears a lifejacket at all times. Accidents happen quickly and there may be no time to look for your lifejacket.
- Crotch straps are recommended in situations other than very calm water. Even when tightly secured, lifejackets have a tendency to ride up on the wearer if there is any wave action. Crotch straps are mandatory for young child-sized lifejackets and in some yacht racing situations.

Some buoyancy vests and lifejackets are designed for specific activities, for example paddling kayaks and waka or water-skiing.



Inflatable lifejackets



Kayak buoyancy vest



Offshore lifejacket



Infant lifejacket

Images courtesy Hutchwilco