

Lifeguard

Get certified at 15, get paid to watch water, and learn how to keep people alive.

TYPICAL PAY

\$33,580

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$26k to \$44k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Pools, beaches, water parks, ski slopes

How you get there

- 1 Be able to swim well** Before anything else
Not just float. You need distance swimming, treading water without your hands, and comfort going under.
- 2 Pass the prerequisite skills test** Day one
The American Red Cross runs a swim, tread, swim sequence on the first day. Fail it and you do not start the course.
- 3 Take the lifeguarding course** About a week
Usually a mix of online lessons and in-water sessions over a few days or weekends. You come out with lifeguarding, CPR and AED (automated external defibrillator) for professional rescuers, and first aid.
- 4 Get hired** Weeks
City pools, the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), water parks, camps, hotels and apartment complexes all hire. Apply in late winter for summer work.
- 5 Recertify every two years** Every 2 years
The Red Cross certification is valid for two years and accepted nationwide. A shorter recertification course renews it.

Pros and cons

- + You can be certified and working at 15 or 16
- + The course takes about a week and costs a few hundred dollars
- + Real responsibility and real training, not a make-work job
- Mostly seasonal, so a full year of pay is rare
- Long hours of boredom that you still have to stay sharp through
- Sun, heat, noise and arguing with people about the rules

Optional boosts

Water safety instructor. Lifeguard instructor. Pool operator certification. Outdoor emergency care for ski patrol.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Lifeguards, Ski Patrol, and Other Recreational Protective Service Workers (33-9092.00)

American Red Cross: lifeguard training and prerequisites

YMCA of the USA

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/lifeguard>

Good to know

Drowning is quiet

Nothing like the movies. A drowning person usually cannot shout, because breathing comes before speech, and their arms are pressing down on the water instead of waving. It can be over in under a minut...

Ten seconds to see it, twenty to get there

A widely used aquatic safety standard asks a guard to spot a problem anywhere in their zone within about 10 seconds and reach the person within about 20. That single rule is why guards rotate so often and w...



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