

Safety Briefing, Lifejackets & Safety Lines and Illness & Medication

The Safety Briefing

Before the boat leaves the dock with a crew for the first time the skipper should deliver a safety briefing. Different skippers will do this briefing differently but it should at least cover the following: Flares, Life Raft, Lifejacket and Safety Line use, EPIRB, Fire Extinguishers and Fire Blankets, basic man over board routine, how to stop and start the engine and where the VHF Radio is.

At this point they will probably also talk about any of the boats quirks that have safety implications. If you don't get a safety briefing ask for one. The skipper should also explain how to use the heads (toilet) and turn the gas for cooking off.

Lifejackets & Safety Lines

As a minimum you should have a working Lifejacket and Safety Line that fits you before you leave the dock. Most modern lifejackets will auto inflate if you fall in the water so its important that its correctly adjusted for you.

Lifejackets should be provided on the boat but it is always a good idea to check the expiry date on the lifejackets canister before using it for the first time. The firing mechanism and gas bottle that inflates the jacket will have a life of about 3-4 years. Good lifejackets will also have a spray hood to keep the water out of your face and a light to make you more visible should you go in the water in the dark.

Lifejackets need to be serviced on a regular basis to make sure the firing mechanism and gas bottle are in date, as part of the servicing the lifejacket will normally be inflated using the manual inflation tube to make sure there are no holes in the bladder that is designed to keep you afloat.

If you buy a lifejacket make sure you try it on first; buying a lifejacket over the Internet isn't a great plan unless it's a model you have already tried. Remember that it has to be adjustable enough to be comfortable when you are wearing just a T-Shirt shirt and when you have 17 layers of thermals on. You also need to be able to move freely in it when you are working on deck.

For racing you should make sure you get a lifejacket with a safety line attachment point. Safety lines are designed to keep you attached to the boat.

The safety line will clip onto your life jacket at one end and a strong point on the boat at the other.

To quote the RNLI “Your life jacket is useless unless worn”.

Illness & Medication

Before the boat leaves the dock is the time to tell the skipper if you have any illnesses that could cause a problem whilst you are afloat or if you are on any medication that you might need to talk for instance for Asthma or an allergy. If you think you are likely to be seasick take the pills before you leave the dock. Once you are being sick its too late.... When you are out on the water make sure you keep warm, eat and drink. Look after the rest of the crew. Sailing is very much a team sport.