

Great White Shark Facts

- 1 As top predators, sharks are critical for maintaining a healthy and balanced marine ecosystem. Great white sharks are the only natural predators of seals in our region.
- 1 Sharks are slow growing, late to mature, and produce few offspring, making them extremely vulnerable and slow to recover from overexploitation.
- 1 Great white shark populations declined dramatically in response to overfishing in the latter half of the twentieth century. As a result, the species was listed as a prohibited species by the United States in 1997 and by the state of Massachusetts in 2005. It is illegal to harvest them.
- 1 Increases in white shark sightings in the past decade suggest regional abundance may be increasing, but the status of the population remains unknown.
- 1 Researchers are currently conducting studies to better understand predatory behavior and to monitor the status of the population to inform public safety practices.

Be Shark Smart

While it is rare for a great white shark to bite a human, it has occurred in the waters off of Cape Cod.

Over the past decade, the coastal waters off Cape Cod have emerged as the newest **great white shark** hotspot. The now-predictable presence of the species is linked to the regional population recovery of grey seals, which are preyed upon by sharks close to shore. These predation events primarily occur in close proximity to the beaches of the outer Cape, where people swim, surf, boogie- and paddle-board, and kayak.

Other Resources:

Division of Marine Fisheries
Massachusetts Shark Research Program
www.mass.gov.marinefisheries

Atlantic White Shark Conservancy
Supporting Local Shark Research and Education
www.atlanticwhiteshark.org



Brochure created by

**The Atlantic White Shark Conservancy and
the towns of Cape Cod and The Islands**
Cover photo credit: NPS/Bill Fisher



Be Shark Smart

Cape Cod and The Islands' waters are part of a natural and wild marine ecosystem with a rich diversity of sea life, including great white sharks.

Great white sharks come to Cape Cod to feed on seals. Sharks have been reported year-round, but peak activity occurs in the summer and fall when water temperatures are warmest.

Sharks hunt for seals in shallow water right along the beach. Seals stay as close to the beach as possible to evade sharks that are hunting them in water that can be less than 5 feet deep.

The only way to completely eliminate the risk of a shark bite is to remain on shore.

If you choose to enter the water:

- Be aware sharks hunt for seals in shallow water.
- Stay close to shore where rescuers can reach you.
- Swim, paddle, kayak and surf in groups – don't isolate yourself.
- Avoid areas where seals are present.
- Avoid areas where schools of fish are visible.
- Avoid murky or low visibility water.
- Limit splashing.
- Adhere to all signage and flag warnings at beaches. Follow instructions of the lifeguards.



Shark Sightings

If you spot a shark along the beach:

- Exit the water calmly and with minimal splashing.
- Notify others in the water around you.
- Notify a lifeguard or a parking lot attendant.
- All shark sightings will be investigated and waters will be closed to swimming and surfing/paddle boarding etc temporarily.
- Shark sightings can be submitted to the **Sharktivity App**.



Purple Shark Flag

When the purple flag is flying great white sharks are in the area.

Dorsal fins frequently mistaken for great white sharks

Ocean Sunfish (pictured below) - not a shark, but a very large harmless fish that moves its fin up and down.

Basking shark - second largest living fish. A slow-moving, harmless shark that feeds on tiny shrimp-like plankton.

In addition to white and basking sharks, sand tiger sharks, sandbar sharks, smooth dogfish, and spiny dogfish frequently visit MA coastal waters. However, these species are not likely to be seen at the surface and pose minimal threat to humans.



First Aid Response

Most white shark bite victims survive because of first aid initiated from bystanders. White shark bites generally result in massive hemorrhaging, which requires immediate first aid in order to stop the blood loss. For first aid training opportunities and more information visit: www.atlanticwhiteshark.org/public-safety

Call 911 for Emergencies

