

Safety Hazards on Santa Rosa Island



Santa Rosa Island is a wild natural area, and your visit may involve some risks. You can avoid problems through awareness of potentially risky situations, and using good judgment:

- **DO NOT RELY ON YOUR CELL PHONE:** Cell phone coverage is spotty and unreliable at best on Santa Rosa Island, do not rely on cell coverage for emergencies and it is best to turn your phone on Airplane mode while visiting to save battery life.
- **Hiking:** Hikers need to assume individual responsibility for planning their trips and hiking safely. There are [hiking guides and maps](#) available in the bunkhouse, as well as backcountry safety awareness information. If at all possible, familiarize yourself with the safety procedures and routes before you head out. Hikers should never hike alone – use the buddy system. This allows someone to go for help if you encounter trouble. There is also a sign-out board posted in the bunkhouse dining room; all hikers are required to record their outings prior to departure. This is a safety system that is only effective if used consistently, so please use this sign-out system.
- **Rugged Terrain:** There are downed logs, unstable rocks, steep slopes, cliffs, steep and narrow roads, and many other potential hazards on Santa Rosa Island. Cliff edges should be avoided at all times, including while on the beach, since they tend to be crumbly and unstable. Stay well back. Be aware of poison oak, “jumping” cholla cactus, ticks, and scorpions. Use caution and good judgment.
- **Dehydration:** Dehydration can lead to life threatening conditions; [heat exhaustion and heat stroke](#). Drink and carry plenty of water. If you wait until you are thirsty, then you already have a negative water balance. A useful rule of thumb for avoiding dehydration in hot environments or during strenuous activity involves monitoring the frequency and character of urination. If one develops a full bladder at least every 3-5 hours and the urine is only lightly colored or colorless, chances are that dehydration is not occurring; if urine is deeply colored, or urination occurs only after many hours or not at all, water intake may not be adequate to maintain proper hydration.
- **Swimming:** Ocean conditions are highly variable and sometimes dangerous. Many beaches on the islands have steep, dangerous shore breaks. The wind and swell generally come from the northwest and become stronger as the day continues. Please be aware of the following suggestions and risks prior to entering the water: There are no lifeguards on duty, so all water sports are at your own risk. Snorkelers, divers, and swimmers should always use the buddy system.
 - Rip currents can be killers. Rip currents are powerful, channeled currents of water flowing away from the shore that quickly pull swimmers out to sea. The most important thing to remember if you’re caught in a rip current is: Don’t swim against the current. Instead, swim across the current, parallel to the shore, slowly working your way back to the beach at an angle. Remain calm and signal if you need help.
 - Watch the weather. Storms and squalls come up quickly.
 - Due to cold water conditions (55° to 70° F) wetsuits and hoods are recommended.
- **Poison Oak:** Common in riparian areas and shaded north facing slopes. May be avoided. "Leaves of three, let them be." For more information on [Poison Oak](#).
- **Ticks and Lyme disease:** Ticks on the island may carry Lyme disease. Routine bodychecks for ticks are advised. If bitten, monitor symptoms and consult with a physician. For more information on [Lyme disease](#).



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- Signs and Symptoms of Lyme Disease: Lyme disease is acquired through the bite of an infected tick. Not all patients with Lyme disease will display all symptoms, and many of the symptoms can occur with other diseases as symptoms include: a red rash (especially surrounding the tick bite), flu-like symptoms (fatigue, chills, fever, and headache), or joint pains in the first month following any tick bite.
- Proper Personal Protection Equipment (PPE): Long sleeved shirts, tuck shirt into pants, and tuck pants into boots. Not wearing the same clothes every day may increase protection as will laundering and using the high heat cycle in a clothes dryer. Conduct a full body check for ticks every day you are in the field.
- Tick Removal: Grasp the tick near the surface of the skin with tweezers and gently but firmly pull away from the skin until the tick pulls out. The tick will not let go easily, but it will release by slowly increasing outward pressure. After the tick is removed, you should wash the bite area and apply antiseptic cream. If pieces of the tick remain embedded, seek medical attention and have those parts removed.
- **Fire:** If you smell or see smoke, please inform research station or park service staff immediately, then head down to the nearest beach.
- **Hantavirus:** This is a potentially fatal disease caused by a virus carried by deer mice. Hantavirus is transmitted through the body fluids of the deer mouse and can become airborne when large masses of feces and urine are disturbed. Short visits to the station present low risk. Most cases of Hantavirus infection have occurred as a result of occupation of buildings that have been inhabited by large numbers of rodents for many years. Do not handle live or dead rodents or their feces or urine. Contact the SRIRS Director, [Robyn Shea](#), if any of those items are discovered. For more [information on Hanta virus](#) see below.
 - Signs and Symptoms of Hantavirus: Mild flu-like symptoms (muscle ache, slight fever, and lethargy), usually two to six weeks after exposure to the virus. Acute respiratory distress may follow. If you experience flu-like symptoms and believe you may have had contact with the rodents within the last 30 days, contact your physician immediately and tell him/her specifically that you believe that you have been exposed to Hantavirus.
 - CSUCI Prevention: CSUCI is making every effort to reduce and avoid contact between station users and mice. We are actively: 1) reducing mouse ingress, egress, and access to the buildings and 2) reducing mouse populations in the building by trapping.
 - User Prevention: Do not feed wild animals, keep food and drink in rodent proof containers, keep cooking and dining areas as clean as possible, and report any signs of rodent infestations to the SRIRS staff on island with you. All building doors should be closed at all times.