

**WILDLIFE  
SMART**



## **COEXISTING WITH BLACK BEARS**



*There are things you can do to reduce the risk of conflicts with black bears. This booklet offers some helpful advice to protect yourself, your family, your property, and black bears.*



*Relocating or destroying bears does not resolve the problem unless the food sources are also removed.*

## COEXISTING WITH BLACK BEARS

Black bears are found throughout Manitoba. Although black bears occasionally wander into human residential areas, they are more likely to be encountered in wooded areas of the province. All Manitobans, and particularly those who live in, work in, or visit wooded areas are encouraged to be *Wildlife Smart* to coexist with black bears. This means taking action to minimize or avoid contact with black bears, and knowing how to react appropriately if you do encounter a bear.

## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BLACK BEARS

Although the coat colour is commonly black, it can be brown, cinnamon, blond or combinations of these colours. Black bears are intelligent, powerful, but shy animals preferring to avoid humans. They are superior climbers, strong swimmers and when running can reach speeds of 50 kilometres (30 miles) per hour.

Bears are always in search of food, motivated by sights, sounds, memories and particularly, odours. When bears find an easy source of food at a residence or campsite, they begin to associate this food source with people and dwellings. When bears discover that humans can be intimidated, they can get bold in acquiring this food.

Bears that learn food is available from residences or campsites become nuisances. This results in people asking for them to be removed. However, relocating or destroying

bears does not resolve the problem. Other bears will take their place. The better solution is to remove food sources from residences and campsites. This will reduce the attraction for them to visit in the first place.

## **WILDLIFE SMART ABOUT BLACK BEARS**

Here are some simple suggestions on how you can be Wildlife Smart about black bears:

- Never approach or crowd a bear – watch it from a safe distance.
- Never feed a bear, whether intentionally or inadvertently – it's unwise and unlawful if it creates a hazard to people and property.
- When walking, be aware of your surroundings, watch for signs that bears may be nearby, and carry deterrents.
- Keep dogs on a leash as they may provoke an attack.
- In wilderness areas, hike in a group, make noise, and carry bear deterrent spray where its easily accessible.

### **Homeowners and cottagers**

- Secure garbage where bears can't access it, in a bear-resistant container/building or with electric fencing.
- Clean garbage containers regularly with bleach or ammonia.
- Take garbage with you when you leave or ask a neighbour to put out your garbage just before pick-up.



*Homeowners, cottagers and campers can discourage bears by handling food and garbage responsibly.*

- Don't burn garbage.
- Don't compost any food items outside.
- Remove all birdfeeders between April and November.
- Clean barbeques thoroughly after every use; don't forget the grease trap.
- Feed pets and keep their food dishes indoors.
- Remove all fruit from your yard as it ripens.
- Be aware that odours from cooking, baking and composting can attract bears.

## Campers

- Keep campsites clean.
- Store food and food-related items in airtight storage containers.
- Properly dispose of all garbage.
- Use bear-proof refuse containers where provided.
- Don't cook, eat or store any food items or other odorous items in your tent.
- If you have a vehicle, store all food inside and out of sight.
- Cooking highly odorous foods such as bacon or fish are more likely to attract a bear.
- Don't dispose of dish water around or near your tent.
- Sleep with deterrents readily accessible.

### Safe Campsite



### Unsafe Campsite



*Secure your attractants to reduce risks to human safety.*

## AVOID BEARS TO STAY SAFE

The best way to stay safe is to avoid all contact with bears. Try following these safety tips while in bear country:

- Learn about black bears, their behaviour and habitat.
- Stay alert and watch for bear signs like tracks, droppings, claw marks on trees, dug up ant hills or rolled over logs.
- Don't obstruct your hearing by listening to music on headphones.
- When hiking, carry bear deterrent spray and also consider taking a walking stick and an air horn as further deterrents.
- Always try to hike with a partner or in a group, and let someone know where you will be and when you expect to return.
- Stay in a group – don't allow anyone to straggle behind or rush ahead.
- Keep dogs on a leash as they may provoke an attack.
- Make your presence known by making noises, such as talking, singing, clapping your hands or using a noise maker.
- Do not wear scented cosmetics or body products.



*The best way to stay safe is to avoid all contact with bears.*

## BEAR ENCOUNTERS

### If you see a bear

- Stop. Remain calm. Assess the situation.
- Do not run away as this may prompt a chase response.
- Do not climb a tree or enter water, as these options will not guarantee your safety.
- If a bear is in a tree, simply leave the area the way you came.
- If the bear is unaware of you, leave the area calmly and quietly when the bear is not looking in your direction.
- If you decide to take a detour, choose a wide path that will not intersect the bear if it is moving.
- If the bear becomes aware of you, calmly identify yourself as human by talking to it in a low, calm voice while waving your arms as you back away slowly to increase your distance.
- Be ready to deploy (or use) the bear deterrent spray if the bear approaches within range.
- Avoid direct eye contact.
- If you are wearing a backpack, keep it on.
- If the bear seems unconcerned, leave the area calmly and quietly.
- As you leave, watch the bear to see if its behaviour changes.



## RESPONDING TO DIFFERENT BEAR BEHAVIOURS

In an encounter where a black bear responds to the presence of people, it may display three main types of behaviour: defensive, non-defensive, and predatory. The following tips will help you assess the behaviour and determine how to respond appropriately.

### **A Defensive Bear**

A black bear may be defensive if it senses a threat to itself, its cubs, or its food source. A defensive bear will often display signs of agitation and stress through vocal and/or visual cues such as huffing, popping of the jaws, pacing, swinging of the head or excessive salivation. This may escalate to slapping the ground or a tree, or to a bluff charge, stopping short of contact. The head will be lowered with ears drawn back while facing you. Your goal in this type of encounter is to avoid being seen as a threat. Talk to the bear in a low, calm voice and slowly back away.



*The first step in a bear encounter is to stop, remain calm and assess the situation.*

If a defensive bear charges:

- Stand your ground, be non-threatening.
- Talk to the bear in a calm voice.
- Deploy (or use) the bear deterrent spray if the bear approaches within range.
- When the bear has moved off, proceed on your way.

If a defensive bear makes contact with you:

- Fall to the ground laying face down with legs slightly apart.
- Lock your fingers behind your head/neck.
- If the bear flips you over, roll back onto your stomach.
- Do not struggle or cry out.
- Do not move until you are sure the bear has left.
- If the attack lasts more than several minutes, the bear is not attacking defensively anymore. Fight back using a knife, rocks, sticks, car keys, or any other available weapon.

### **A Non-defensive (Investigative) Bear**

If a bear approaches in a non-defensive or investigative manner, it will show little signs of stress. It may be curious, used to people, after your food, wanting right of way, or to assert dominance. In the rarest case, a bear may be predatory.

A curious bear's approach will be slow and hesitant with ears cocked forward and its nose raised to investigate; bears that have been food-conditioned or habituated to the presence of people may approach more boldly.

If a non-defensive (investigative) bear approaches you:

- Talk to the bear in a firm voice.
- Group together.
- Be ready to use a deterrent, such as bear deterrent spray, a walking stick or noise maker.
- Calmly try to move out of the bear's way; if it follows you, it should be treated as a predatory bear.

### **A Predatory (Stalking) Bear**

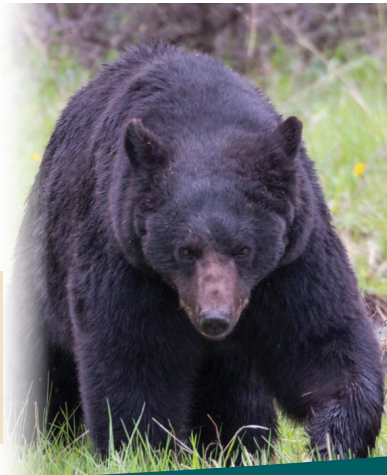
A predatory bear's approach will be deliberate and silent. This bear is the type you should be most concerned with. The head will be up and ears erect, displaying no signs of stress. The bear will be intensely focused on the person it considers its prey. Your goal in this type of encounter is to convince the bear that you are not easy prey.

If a predatory bear continues to follow you:

- Stop and stand your ground.



*A predatory bear's approach will be deliberate and silent. This bear is the type you should be most concerned with.*



- Make direct eye contact.
- Act aggressively; shout, wave your arms, stomp your feet, deploy noise makers (such as whistles, air horns or rattlers).
- Elevate yourself onto a log or rock and raise your jacket to look bigger.
- Deploy your bear deterrent spray if the bear approaches within range.

If a predatory bear attacks you:

- Fight back with anything at hand. Use your bear deterrent spray, walking stick, knife, firearm, rocks, sticks, binoculars, car keys, or even bare hands.
- Strike for the bear's eyes or nose, where it is most vulnerable.
- Kick and yell.
- Be relentless, you are fighting for your life!



## BEAR DETERRENT SPRAY

Bear deterrent spray is a highly recommended tool to deter approaches and potential attacks by black bears. However, it should never be a substitute for practicing the principles of being Wildlife Smart and learning how to avoid encounters with black bears.

Bear attack research has shown that the use of bear deterrent spray can be more effective than firearms, at reducing the risk of human fatality or serious injury. Hunters and trappers who carry firearms are also encouraged to carry bear deterrent spray.

**CAUTION:** Bear deterrent spray does not guarantee the prevention of an attack or injury from an attack by a black bear.

### WHAT IS BEAR DETERRENT SPRAY?

- It is used to deter an approaching bear (or other wild mammal) and give you an opportunity to leave the area while the bear is dealing with an unpleasant irritant.
- It is not a repellent and if used as such may actually attract bears. Do NOT spray clothing, tents, etc. with it.
- It contains capsaicin (a hot red pepper derivative), a carrier (to hold the capsaicin in an evenly mixed liquid state), and a propellant.
- It acts as a powerful local irritant to a bear's nose, eyes, and respiratory system, causing stinging, difficulty breathing, and sometimes a temporary loss of sight.

- Its effects are temporary and non-lethal.
- When deployed, the spray exits the canister in a cone-shaped cloud at more than 100-kilometres per hour. Even in unfavorable wind conditions, some of the spray will still deploy in front of the bear when used as directed.
- Bear deterrent spray may also be called bear pepper spray, bear deterrent pepper spray, bear capsicum spray or bear attack deterrent. **Bear deterrent spray should not be confused with pepper spray.** These are two different products.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN BEAR DETERRENT SPRAY

There are several brands of spray with different characteristics. Choose a brand that has a label on the canister declaring the product:

- is a bear attack deterrent or bear deterrent, and clearly identifies the product as an *irritant* to deter bears from attacking people.
- has a capsaicin content between one and two per cent; the higher, the better.
- Canisters are typically 225 ml or larger, but cannot exceed 500 ml. Choose the largest canister you can find and that you are able to carry where its readily accessible to you.
- Check the expiry date. The capsaicin content does not lessen, but the propellant can break down over time (limiting the range and effectiveness of the spray).



- Check manufacturers' websites for dispersal characteristics. Look for a:
  - spray distance of eight metres or more
  - spray time of eight seconds or more
  - spray that dispenses in a cloud rather than a narrow stream
- Do not use bear deterrent spray that you suspect has been frozen.

## IS IT LEGAL TO POSSESS?

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, deterrent sprays that use the natural ingredient capsaicin are classified as prohibited weapons unless used for the purposes which they are manufactured such as bear deterrent or bear attack deterrent. Anglers, hikers, hunters and others working or recreating in bear country may carry bear deterrent spray if they can reasonably show that its purpose is to protect them against an animal attack.

## HOW TO USE BEAR DETERRENT SPRAY

- It is recommended you first purchase either a regular canister or, preferably, an inert canister (with no capsaicin) and practise using it to learn how they work.



*Example of how to use bear deterrent spray.*



- When practising, have water available to wash your hands afterward. Practise removing the canister quickly from the holster and taking off the safety – keep in mind that a charging bear 10 metres away will reach you in four seconds or less.
- Before carrying your deterrent spray in bear country, read the label and familiarize yourself with the effective range and amount of spray time available for that canister.
- If you see/hear signs of a bear nearby, have the spray canister ready in your hand, with the safety off, and leave the area the way you came.
- Whenever possible, deploy deterrent in a downwind direction.
- After removing the safety clip, keep one hand on the trigger and grasp the canister with the other hand for stability (otherwise it may recoil upwards).
- When the bear is within range (as indicated by your canister), aim and point the canister downward and slightly in front of the bear so the bear will pass through the emerging cloud of spray as it approaches.
- Spray in a one or two second burst, and leave the area. You have approximately six to eight seconds of spray time in a canister. You may need to redeploy the spray if the bear continues to follow you; make sure you save enough spray to last until you are able to reach a secure area.

## BEAR ATTACKS ARE EXTREMELY RARE

Between 1900 and 2022, there have been 77 fatal black bear attacks in North America with predatory attacks being more frequent than defensive attacks. In spite of thousands of encounters between people and bears, there have been three black bear-inflicted deaths in Manitoba. All have been the result of predatory attacks.

## LETHAL REMOVAL

Black bears can be harvested by a licensed hunter or trapper during a regulated season. All hunting and trapping regulations apply.

Under The Wildlife Act, in certain circumstances, a black bear may be killed to defend one's property. For additional information about this provision, please contact Manitoba Government Inquiries at 204-945-3744, 1-866-MANITOBA or [mgi@gov.mb.ca](mailto:mgi@gov.mb.ca).

---

For more information on reducing the risk of conflicts with black bears and other wildlife visit **[manitoba.ca/human-wildlife](https://manitoba.ca/human-wildlife)**.

To report wildlife showing aggressive behaviour or that appears sick, injured, or orphaned, contact a conservation officer at the local district office or call the TIP line at **1-800-782-0076**.

# You are in *Bear Country!*

**Don't feed Bears!**



**Keep a clean  
campsite!**

**MANITOBA NATURAL RESOURCES  
AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT**

Wildlife Branch

Box 24, 14 Fultz Boulevard  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3Y 0L6

**Phone: 204-945-7775**  
**[manitoba.ca/human-wildlife](https://manitoba.ca/human-wildlife)**

*Aussi disponible en français.*

To report wildlife showing aggressive behaviour, or that appears sick, injured, or orphaned, contact a conservation officer at the local district office or call the TIP line at

**1-800-782-0076.**