

Handle bear spray carefully and use it as a weapon of last resort. Because of wind conditions, your state of mind or other circumstances of attack, you may not be able to hit the bear in the eyes, mouth or nose. When choosing a bear spray, you should look for a quality product that dispenses the contents in a cloud rather than a narrow stream. If you carry a spray, attach a full canister in a holster onto your belt or outer clothing and become familiar with its use. This will require that you practise discharging a can downwind in an area away from people. The cost of the rehearsal will be money well spent.

Protect our natural wildlife heritage

Black bears are part of our heritage. Manitoba has a healthy black bear population, and we need to ensure that it remains that way. To co-exist in harmony with bears, we must remember that the bear is a wild animal and we must do our part to minimize the chances of an undesirable bear encounter.

The saddest aspect of human interaction with black bears is the fact that hundreds of bears die each year, because of it. Black bears that become used to eating foods associated with humans usually develop into problem animals and must be either relocated or destroyed. Relocation is often unsuccessful because a bear takes its learned bad habits and applies them in the area where it was relocated or it dies in the territory of another bear. Often it returns to the original area and resumes its nuisance behaviour. Destruction becomes the only alternative when a bear becomes habituated and food-conditioned. People can reduce this consequence by removing all attractants and by handling food and garbage responsibly.

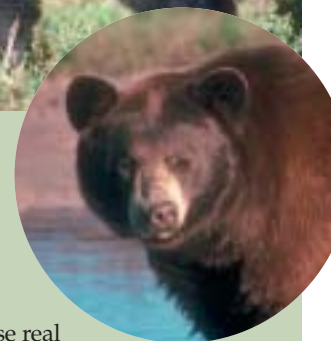
For details, please refer to our “*Removing the Attractant, Removes the Bear*” handout.

If bears make the place where you live or spend your vacation unsafe, contact your nearest Manitoba Conservation office for assistance. Telephone numbers are listed in *The Cottager’s Handbook* or Manitoba’s *Hunting Guide*. In an emergency, call the local RCMP office. If you are forced to kill a bear to defend yourself or your property, you are required to report the killing to a Natural Resource officer within 10 days.

For additional information, please visit our website at www.gov.mb.ca/blackbear.

BLACK BEAR ENCOUNTERS

What to do



Black bears are found throughout Manitoba. Their fur coats can sometimes be various shades of brown, cinnamon, blond or any combination of these. They are fascinating animals but can pose real danger to people. In dealing with black bears, caution, care and respect are *always* an absolute rule.

A bear’s behaviour and the territory it covers are largely influenced by its continual search for food. Black bears are naturally inquisitive and normally timid, preferring to avoid humans. With repeated exposure to humans at close range and without negative consequence, bears can learn to tolerate people at these distances and become habituated. Bears that are both habituated and food-conditioned are the most likely to be a problem, and may, on occasion, become aggressive. It is our responsibility as guests in bear country to be cautious and to help keep bears from becoming a nuisance or a danger.

If confronted by a bear, you may have only seconds to make some important decisions. A little knowledge can help you decide what to do. This is important in avoiding a tragic outcome.

BE AWARE IN BEAR COUNTRY

Because bear encounters can be complex, there is no 100 per cent certain way to ensure your safety. The following are only suggestions that may fit the situation you may be faced with while in bear country.

To be safe, **AVOID ALL CONTACT** with bears.

- Learn about black bears, their habits, behaviour, food selection and habitat use.
- Stay alert, and be aware of your surroundings. Watch for bear signs like tracks, droppings, turned-up stumps and claw marks in trees. If possible,

stay in the open and avoid bear-activity areas, such as travel corridors along waterways and especially berry patches and carcass remains.

- While walking in bear country, take a walking stick, an air-horn, and carry pepper spray attached to your belt.
- Don’t hike alone. Travel with a friend or, at the very least, tell someone where you will be.
- Never let children straggle behind or rush ahead.
- Dogs can serve as an early-warning system for the presence of bears but should be kept on a leash at all times. If an unrestrained dog confronts a bear, the bear may follow the dog back to its owner.
- Make your presence known by any means available to you – wave your arms slowly, sing, clap your hands, talk in a calm voice. Don’t whistle, as it may resemble an animal’s call and could attract a bear from afar.
- Do not use a headphone device – walkmans, CD-players.
- Do not use scented hair or body products.
- Backwood users must keep campsites clean. They should store food and unwashed utensils in airtight storage containers to minimize odours and pack all remaining garbage for proper disposal. Only if necessary, burn (in approved facilities where fires are allowed) garbage, sanitary materials, cooking grease and food scraps rather than burying them. **Become aware of local fire restrictions.**
- Avoid carrying and/or cooking highly odorous food (canned fish, bacon, etc.).
- Place food, the clothing you cooked in and any synthetic-based odours (perfumes, deodorants, toothpaste) out of the reach of a bear, not in your tent. Suspend these items at least four meters (15 feet) off the ground in between two trees and well away from your campsite. If you are camping in or by a vehicle, store all food, cooking clothes and garbage inside the vehicle.
- Do not dispose of dishwater around or near your tent.

If you see a bear...

Each encounter is unique. There is no guarantee that what works in one instance will work in another. In the collective opinion of experts, the following are recommended:

- Stop, remain calm and try to assess the situation.
- **NEVER approach or crowd** a bear.



IF A BEAR APPROACHES YOU...

A black bear will react to humans in one of two ways:

Offensive manner – the bear either wants right-of-way, to assert dominance, or it may be stalking you as possible prey

Defensive manner – a bear sees you as a threat to it, its cubs, or its food

Offensive Situations

If a bear has not been approached and is not stressed, you should interpret any silent advance as offensive. The bear's head will be up and ears erect.

- A first response should be to give the bear right-of-way by moving aside and watching the bear.
- If it continues to follow you, you may try dropping your pack and food, then slowly move away while keeping an eye on the bear.

Reacting to a offensive situation

- If the bear ignores your pack or food and continues to follow you: **Stop and stand your ground.** If you are with others, stay closely together and act as a group.
- Make sure the bear has a clear escape route.
- Act aggressively to persuade the bear you are not easy prey.
- Stare it in the eye.
- Raise your jacket to look bigger.
- Shout. Wave your arms. Stomp your feet.
- Stand on a log or rock.
- Slowly move uphill from it.
- Use an air-horn if available.
- Use your bear spray if within range.
- Use your firearm if you have one.
- If the bear attacks silently, **fight back** with anything at hand.
- Use your walking stick or grab a rock.
- Use a stout piece of wood or knife.
- Strike for the nose or eyes.
- Kick, yell, be ruthless.

YOU ARE FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE.

Defensive Situations

A bear may run or it may defend itself by acting aggressively. These bears usually become stressed, often giving visual and vocal cues:

- swatting or slamming it's paw against the ground
- blowing explosively through its nostrils
- exhaling loudly, huffing and moaning
- jaw-popping (snapping its teeth)
- lowering the head with ears drawn back while facing you
- excessive salivation

The situation may escalate to an actual charge, but it is most often a bluff where the bear stops and veers away before making contact.

Reacting to a defensive approach or charge

- **Stand your ground.**
- When the bear has stopped its advance, slowly back away, watching the bear through the corner of your eye and talking to it in a calm, low voice.
- If you haven't already done so, prepare your deterrent such as bear spray, knife or firearm, if you have it.
- If the bear attacks, **fall to the ground** immediately upon contact.
- Lay on your stomach with your legs spread slightly apart, locking your fingers behind your head. If the bear flips you over, roll back on your stomach to protect your vital organs and face.
- Do not struggle or cry out.
- When the attack is broken off, do not move or make a sound until you are sure the bear has left. If you do, the bear may resume the attack because it still feels threatened.

Both approaches are extremely rare with **offensive** attacks being more frequent than **defensive** attacks.

Black Bear attacks are rare

Despite many bear-human encounters, bear attacks are infrequent, and cases of bear-inflicted deaths are even more rare. Stephen Herrero, author of *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*, has documented 54 fatal maulings in North America between 1900 and 2003. Over half the fatalities have occurred since 1980, including eight this century. In most cases, people were preyed upon by offensive bears living in rural or remote areas. The bears were not likely exposed to people, food or garbage. Some were campground or garbage bears, that had become progressively less fearful of humans and decided to kill. In Manitoba, there are only two records of a black bear causing a human fatality, despite thousands of encounters between people and bears.

It's unlikely the victims did anything, deliberately or inadvertently, to trigger the attacks. The victim may just have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Commercial bear repellent

Under *Canada's Criminal Code*, repellent sprays that use the natural ingredient *Capsaicin* (a derivative of cayenne pepper) are prohibited unless used to protect yourself against an animal attack.

Capsicum spray should never be a substitute for practising bear awareness and safety. The spray is no guarantee against injury from black bear attacks, but it can often act as a limited deterrent with limited range. Under typical conditions, range is good up to six to seven metres (20 feet), but is most effective at three to four metres (15 feet). The spray can be somewhat effective in repelling black bears in remote areas, but is less effective against bears strongly conditioned to human foods and garbage.



- If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone by vacating the area. When it feels safe, it will climb down and leave.
- **Never feed a bear!**
- **Never run** unless reaching safety is a guarantee. If you are near a building or car, get inside. Fleeing may trigger a chase response. With a burst speed of 50 kilometres/hour (30 miles per hour), a bear can outrun any human and most cyclists.
- Climbing a tree or entering water is not a guarantee of safety, since black bears are superior climbers and strong swimmers.

If a bear seems *unaware* of you...

- Move away quietly when the bear is not looking toward you. Keep your eye on the bear, but do not make direct eye contact because it may be interpreted as a challenge.

If a bear is *aware* of you...

- Let it know you are human. Talk to the bear in a low tone of voice and wave your arms slowly while moving away upwind, if practical, to give the bear your scent.
- A bear standing on its hind legs is seldom getting ready to attack. It is only trying to get a better look or smell.