

Ontario is now in Step Three of the [Roadmap to Reopen](#). Follow the [restrictions and public health measures](#).



Be Bear Wise and prevent bear encounters

Prevent and report encounters with black bears and learn who to contact.

Emergency

Call 911 or your local police

Non-emergency

Call 1-866-514-2327

TTY: 705-945-7641

Who to contact

Not every bear sighting is an emergency situation. Here is who to call if you encounter a bear.

Emergency situations

Call 911 or your local police if a bear poses an immediate threat to personal safety and exhibits threatening or aggressive behaviour, such as:

- enters a school yard when school is in session
- stalks people and lingers at the site
- enters or tries to enter a residence
- wanders into a public gathering
- kills livestock/pets and lingers at the site

Police will respond first to an emergency situation, but may request assistance from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry during daylight hours.

Non-emergency encounters

Call the toll-free Bear Wise reporting line at 1-866-514-2327 (TTY: 705-945-7641) if a bear:

- roams around or checks garbage cans
- breaks into a shed where garbage or food is stored
- is in a tree
- pulls down a bird feeder or knocks over a barbecue
- moves through a backyard or field but does not linger

This line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from April 1 to November 30.

If you encounter a black bear

When bears are caught off guard, they are stressed, and usually just want to flee.

Stop. Do not panic. Remain calm.

Generally, the noisier the bear is, the less dangerous it is, provided you do not approach. The noise is meant to “scare” you off and acts as a warning signal.

Do

- Slowly back away while keeping the bear in sight and wait for it to leave.
- If the bear does not leave, throw objects, wave your arms and make noise with a whistle or air horn.
- Prepare to use bear spray.
- If you are near a building or vehicle get inside as a precaution.
- Drop any food you may be carrying and slowly move away.
- If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone. Leave the area. The bear will come down when it feels safe.

Do not

- Run, climb a tree or swim.
- Kneel down.
- Make direct eye contact.
- Approach the bear to get a better look.
- Attempt to feed a bear.

Bear warning signs

Black bear attacks are **extremely rare**.

A threatened black bear will give off warning signs to let you know you are too close. A black bear standing on its hind legs is not a sign of aggressive behaviour. The bear is trying to get a better look at you or catch your scent.

A defensive bear

A bear that feels threatened will:

- salivate excessively and exhale loudly
- make huffing, moaning, clacking and popping sounds with its mouth, teeth and jaws
- lower its head with its ears drawn back while facing you
- charge forward, and/or swat the ground with its paws (known as a ‘bluff’ charge)

A predatory bear

The bear will approach silently, usually in rural or remote areas, and may continue to approach regardless of your attempts to deter them by yelling or throwing rocks. If the bear attacks:

- use bear spray
- fight back with everything you have
- do not play dead unless you are sure a mother bear is attacking in defence of her cubs

After the bear leaves

- Report the bear encounter by calling 1-866-514-2327 (TTY 705-945-7641)
- Tell your neighbours about bear activity in the area.
- If the bear was eating non-natural food (such as garbage or bird food), remove or secure the item.

When to use self defence

If you have tried everything possible to get a bear to leave your property and you are afraid for your safety, you have the right to protect yourself and your property.

Killing a bear in self-defence must be an action of last resort.

Any action you take must be done:

- according to applicable laws (for example, discharging a firearm by-laws)
- safely
- in the most humane way possible

You do not need a hunting licence to kill a bear in self-defence. If you kill a bear and do not intend to keep it, you must **report it immediately** to your [local Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry office \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-natural-resources-and-forestry-regional-and-district-offices\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-natural-resources-and-forestry-regional-and-district-offices).

If you kill a bear and want to keep it, you must [register for a Notice of Possession \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/keep-dead-wild-animal\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/keep-dead-wild-animal) with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Bear fact:

Most bears encountering a barking dog will climb a tree or run away, but in some instances the bear may chase the dog back to its owner and react defensively against the dog or person.



Prevent conflicts with black bears

Bears usually avoid humans, but they are attracted into urban and rural areas to get food.

Bears will be attracted to your neighbourhood by:

- strong food aromas
- the scent of garbage
- cooking smells
- ripe fruits and pet food left outside

If bears learn that they can find food where people live, they will return again and again as long as the food source is available and will even try to enter buildings. Relocation and dispatch of bears are poor ways of trying to prevent conflicts with bears.



(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKAmlh7U19c>).

[Be Bear Wise - Food \(Video\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKAmlh7U19c) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKAmlh7U19c>).

Be Bear Wise - Relocating | Attention Ou...



[Be Bear Wise - Relocating \(Video\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bQkmBnUlrc) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bQkmBnUlrc>).

To avoid bear encounters, follow these Bear Wise tips.



Garbage:

- put garbage out only on the morning of garbage day, not the night before
- put meat scraps in the freezer until garbage day
- put garbage in containers that have tight-fitting lids and store it in a bear-proof location such as your basement or a sturdy garage
- frequently wash garbage cans and recycle containers and lids with a strong-smelling disinfectant, such as bleach
- take garbage to the dump often, if you do not have curbside pick-up

**Bird feeders:**

- fill bird feeders only through the winter months
- put away feeders in the spring and instead, offer birds natural alternatives (for example, flowers, nesting boxes and fresh water)

**Barbecue:**

- burn off food residue and wash the grill right away
- empty the grease trap every time you barbecue
- remove all utensils, dishes and food after eating
- be aware that cooking odours can attract bears

**Fruits and berries:**

- pick all ripe and fallen fruit from trees and shrubs on your property
- plant non-fruit bearing trees and shrubs

**Pet food:**

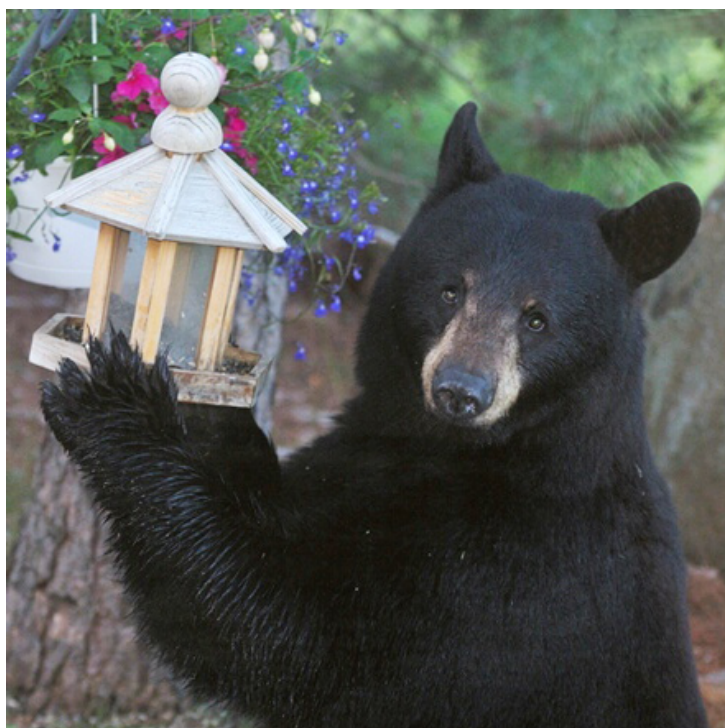
- do not leave pet food outdoors, in screened-in areas or porches

**Dogs:**

- leash your dog(s) when walking through communities or out in bear country to reduce the potential of dogs harassing a black bear or of being attacked by one
- unleashed dogs may instigate a chase response that may lead the bear back to you
- check your yards for the presence of a black bear before letting your dogs out

Bear fact:

Bears love bird feeders. Bird seeds are a high source of calories for bears. Store bird seed and feeder indoors until winter months.

**Bear Wise tips and tools**

Learn how to [keep bears away from your school, cottage and farm \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/bear-wise-tips-and-tools\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/bear-wise-tips-and-tools).

When out in bear country

Bears are smart, curious, powerful and potentially dangerous. **And they don't like surprises.** If you are a hiker, cyclist, jogger, berry picker or you plan to spend some time in "bear country," learn to be Bear Wise to avoid an encounter.

Avoid bear-human interactions

Alert bears to your presence so they can avoid you. Make noise, such as singing, whistling or talking while in areas with restricted visibility or with high background noise, such as near streams and waterfalls.

While outdoors:

- travel in groups of two or more—people who travel alone are most vulnerable
- scan your surroundings and do not wear music headphones
- watch for signs of bear activity such as tracks, claw marks on trees, flipped-over rocks or fresh bear droppings
- leash your dog, as uncontrolled, untrained dogs may actually lead a bear to you
- pay attention, especially if you are working, gardening or berry picking
- rise slowly if you are in a crouched position so that you don't startle nearby bears
- avoid strong fragrances that may cause a bear to be curious
- put any food you are carrying in sealed containers in your pack

Be prepared

You should:

- carry a whistle or air horn
- learn how to use bear pepper spray and carry it somewhere that's easy to access
- consider carrying a long-handled axe, if you are in remote areas or deep in the forest

Bear fact:

Discuss bears with children. Teach children simple things like making sure they can always see an adult; to never approach a bear or other animals; to never run from a bear and if they see a bear to stay calm and call for help.



About black bears

Black bears live throughout most of Ontario. They primarily inhabit forested areas where they are best able to find food, refuge and den sites.

Eating habits and diet

Their entire life revolves around food. When they are not hibernating, bears spend most of their time looking for food.

From the time they come out of hibernation until berry crops are available, bears live off their stored fat and the limited energy provided by fresh spring greens. They get most of their food energy by feeding on summer berry crops like blueberries, raspberries, and cherries. In the fall, they turn their attention to hazel nuts, mountain ash, acorns and beech nuts.

Though black bears will eat carrion, insects, fish, deer fawns and moose calves, the bulk of their diet is plant material. Their natural preference is to find lots of high energy food – like berry patches – that will help them fatten up fast. Their survival and ability to have and raise young depend on their ability to put on weight before going into winter hibernation.

The availability of their natural food varies from season to season and from year to year. When natural food sources are poor, black bears will travel long distances to seek out alternative sources of food.

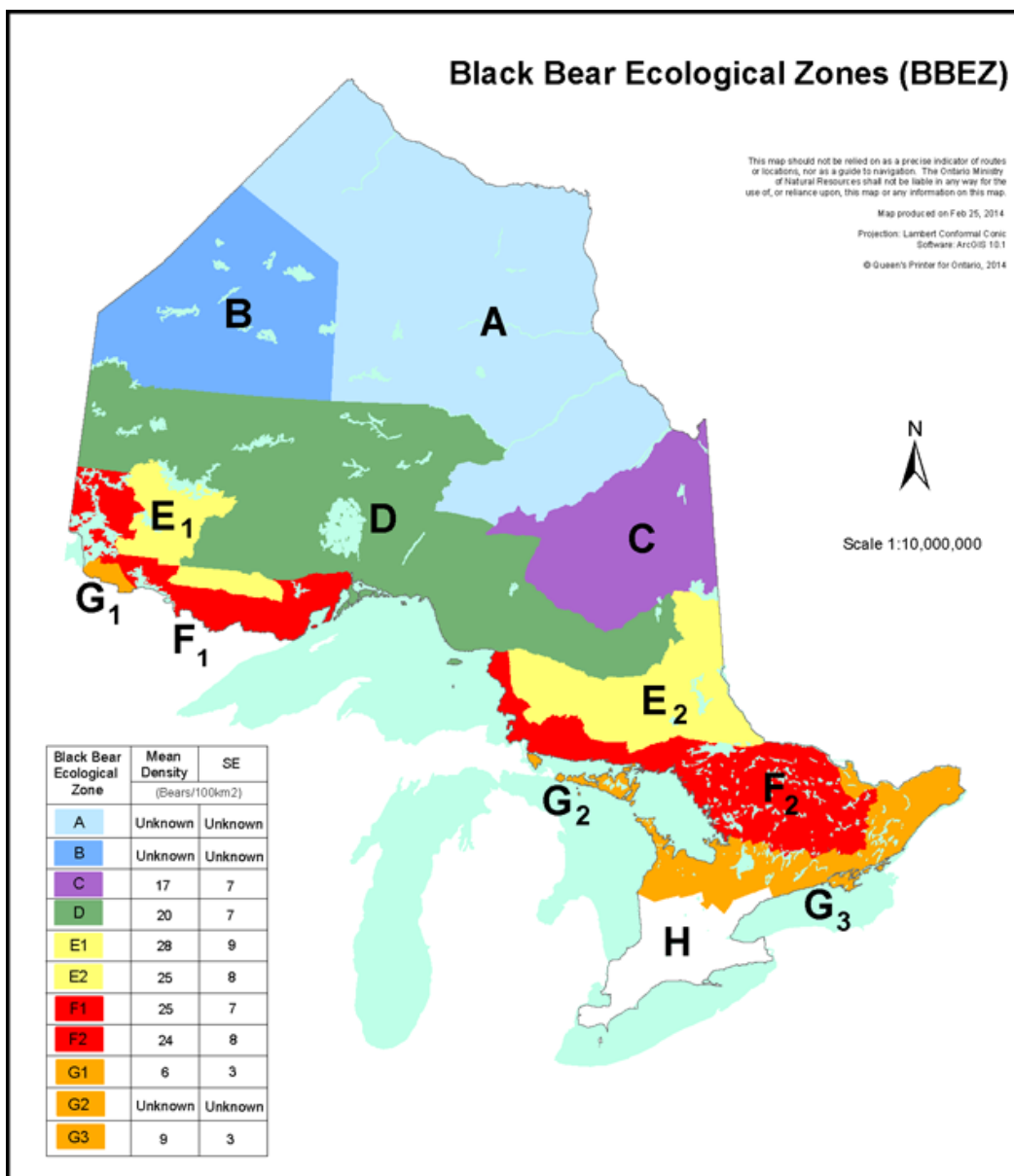
Bear reports in Ontario

The number of calls reporting bear sightings was down in 2019 due to a good natural food crop.



(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYhboT9ggFQ>).

[Be Bear Wise – Risk and Reward \(Video\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYhboT9ggFQ) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYhboT9ggFQ>).



(<https://files.ontario.ca/blackbear-ecological-zones-english-04022019.pdf>)

Enlarge bear density map (<https://files.ontario.ca/blackbear-ecological-zones-english-04022019.pdf>)

Take community action

It takes the local community to prevent conflicts with bears. You may be doing your part, but if your neighbour is not, you may still encounter a bear on your property as a result.

Commit your community to becoming Bear Wise. Remind your neighbours to do their part by:

- sharing [Bear Wise tips \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/bear-wise-tips-and-tools\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/bear-wise-tips-and-tools) with your neighbours
- starting a conversation about how you can work together to prevent conflicts with bears (for example, make sure the whole street waits until morning to put out garbage for collection)

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