

Hiking in Black Bear territory

Hikers and trail blazers in the Lions Bay area could increase their safety by educating themselves about black bears before venturing into bear territory.

Avoid Black Bear Encounters

- Hike in a group, most bears will leave the area if they are aware of your presence.
- Stay on established trails and hike only in daylight.
- Keep children close at hand and within sight
- Use extra caution when travelling near rushing water or into the wind. A bear may not be able to hear or smell you coming.
- Stay in the open as much as possible

Be alert! Watch for signs. Tracks, droppings, diggings, torn-up logs, and scratched trees may indicate that a bear is nearby.



Black Bears signs, tracks, droppings, and scratches

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Use caution when travelling near natural bear foods. Berries, fish, and carrion (dead animals) are all food sources for bears, which they may defend.

Keep dogs under control. Dogs may infuriate a bear, inciting an attack. Your dog may then run to you with the bear in pursuit!

Watch for cubs. Bears may become aggressive if they feel their young are threatened. Never pass between a mother and her cub(s).

When hiking in deep snow avoid black bear denning sites. Black bears usually choose den sites close to valley bottoms. The bears dig cavities in old growth trees, under stumps or beneath brush piles. In second growth forest areas, dens are more often located in ground cavities.

When creating new trails try to avoid blind corners, right angle turns or short sightlines. Increased visibility will allow hikers to watch for wildlife that may be nearby.

If You Encounter a Bear

Keep calm.

Think ahead, and plan how you would respond if you encounter a bear.

Don't run. Bears can easily outrun you.

Running may trigger an attack. Pick up small children and stay in a group.

Give the bear space.

Back away slowly and talk in a soft voice. Do not approach the bear or make direct eye contact.

Leave the area or make a wide detour.

If you cannot leave, wait until the bear moves away and ensure that it has an escape route.

The bear may approach you or rear up on its hind legs.

Bears are curious. If a bear stands on its hind legs, it is most likely trying to catch your scent and is not necessarily a sign of aggression. Back away slowly and talk in a soft voice.

Do not drop objects, clothing, or food to distract the bear.

If the bear receives food, it will have been rewarded for its aggressive behaviour, thereby increasing the likelihood that it will repeat that behaviour again.

Watch for aggressive behaviours. A bear may display aggression by swinging its head from side to side; making vocalizations such as huffs, snorts, whoops, or moans; displaying teeth or claws; jaw popping; swatting at the ground; staring with eye contact; panting; or laying its ears back. These behaviours usually indicate that the bear is stressed, acting defensively and asking for more space.

If an Attack Occurs

Black bear attacks are rare! However, if one occurs, remember these guidelines.

Defensive attack:

If you surprise a bear and it responds to defend itself, then play dead by lying on your stomach with your legs apart; protect your face, the back of your head and neck with your arms; remain silent; and if wearing a pack, leave it on for protection. Most bears will leave you alone once it believes the threat is passed.

Offensive attack:

This is the most serious and potentially deadly attack a black bear might make! It occurs when a bear appears to stalk or follow you for a period of time and then chooses to attack; or when the bear attacks you at night.

In this situation, playing dead is not appropriate. Try to escape to a secure place such as a vehicle. Climbing a tree is an option, but remember that black bears can climb trees easily. If you cannot escape and a bear continues its pursuit, react aggressively and try to intimidate the bear. If this fails, fight back with anything at hand such as rocks, sticks, knives, bear spray or other possible weapons to let the bear know that you are not easy prey. Act as a group if you are part of one. Don't forget to yell; help may be close by.

Chemical bear repellents/bear sprays contain a derivative of cayenne pepper. When sprayed directly into an animal's face, they cause eye and upper respiratory tract irritation. Although such sprays can be effective when used properly, wind and other circumstances may alter their effect on the animal. Therefore, use them with caution and always follow the manufacturer's directions. Bear sprays do not guarantee your safety.

Problem Bears are created by people

Black bears are opportunists, always on the lookout for "easy" calories. Once they find human food or garbage, they continue to seek it out from backpacks, picnic tables, coolers, etc. If they become accustomed to humans, their natural fear of people fades and they take more chances to find food rewards. These "spoiled bears" are unpredictable and may be aggressive. Please bring all your food and garbage with you to eliminate feeding a bear unnaturally.

Enjoy the forests surrounding Lions Bay, but remember this is black bear territory and hike safely.