



## BLACK BEARS IN VIRGINIA

Black bears occur throughout Virginia and there are increasing opportunities for encounters. Bears are most active from April 1 — November 1, any time of day. Many people enjoy the opportunity to see bears in the wild. However, when natural foods are scarce, and when human-related foods are available, bears may venture closer to homes or recreation sites to access garbage, bird food, pet food, and grills.

Residents and visitors to Virginia can minimize negative interactions with bears by simply removing or securing common bear attractants.

## QUICK TIPS

Bear encounters resulting in injury are incredibly rare. The way you behave in an encounter will directly influence the outcome. Follow these simple steps to avoid and safely end encounters that do occur.

- Hike or walk in groups of 2 or more people
- Keep your dog leashed
- Never run from a bear or try to approach one
- Back away from a bear
- Carry bear pepper spray

### If a bear follows you or becomes aggressive

- Intimidate by waving your arms
- Fight back or use bear pepper spray
- Report this to Wildlife Conflict Helpline

**You can avoid bear encounters near your home and in your neighborhood by removing attractants like trash and bird feeders.**

More Information:

[www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear/)  
[www.dgif.virginia.gov/bear-aware/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/bear-aware/)

Wildlife Conflict Helpline:  
**855.571.9003**

**What you do really matters**  
**Keep Bears Wild**

Content developed by the Northeast Black Bear Technical Committee comprised of state and provincial black bear biologists from the northeastern US and Canada.



DEPARTMENT OF  
**GAME & INLAND  
FISHERIES**  
CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.



## AVOIDING BLACK BEAR ENCOUNTERS

**IN THE WOODS,  
YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD,  
OR BACKYARD**

## SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Black bears capture human admiration and interest like few other wildlife species. Citizens, communities, local governments, and VDGIF share the responsibility in preventing problems and keeping bears wild.



## IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR

Bear attacks on people are very uncommon and bears rarely become aggressive when encountered. However, it's best to avoid bears by following these simple steps, and to know what to do in an encounter.



### IN THE WOODS

- Do not approach the bear
- Quietly back away and leave the area



### IN YOUR BACKYARD

- From a safe distance, make loud noises, shout, or bang pots and pans to scare the bear
- When the bear leaves, remove attractants such as garbage, pet food or bird feeders
- Ask neighbors to remove attractants



### IN A BUILDING, DUMPSTER, OR AROUND THE CORNER

- Give the bear a clear escape route
- Leave any doors open as you back away from the bear
- Do not lock a bear in a room



## AVOIDING BEARS WHEN CAMPING, HIKING, OR WALKING



### WHILE HIKING OR WALKING

- Be aware of your surroundings
- Hike in groups and stay together
- Do not ever run from a bear
- Keep dogs on a leash or leave them at home
- Make noise to let the bear know you are there
- Carry pepper spray



### WHILE CAMPING

- Do not store food in your tent
- Cook 100 yards from tent
- Clean cooking area thoroughly
- Don't sleep in the clothes you cooked in
- Store food, trash, lotions, toothpaste and deodorant in:
  - A bear resistant container or food locker
  - Suspended from a tree 100 yards from sleeping area
  - If no other options: in a vehicle with the windows closed



## IF A BEAR ....

### APPROACHES YOU OR MAKES NOISE

- Make yourself look bigger by raising your arms
- Repeat "Hey, bear" while backing away

### FOLLOWS YOU

- Stay together in group
- Do not run but continue to back away

### CONTINUES TO FOLLOW YOU

- Stand your ground, stay together
- Intimidate by making yourself look bigger and making noise (wave arms, shout, clap, bang stick)
- Prepare to fight or use bear pepper spray

### CHARGES YOU

- Stand your ground
- Remain calm
- Dispense pepper spray in circular motion

### MAKES CONTACT WITH YOU

- Fight back with anything at hand (knife, sticks, rocks, binoculars, backpack) or by kicking