# Birmingham faces waste management crisis as refuse workers strike



Birmingham is currently facing a significant waste management crisis as ongoing strike action by refuse workers has resulted in an alarming backlog of rubbish across the city. This has prompted Birmingham City Council to declare a major incident to address the growing public health concerns related to overflowing waste bins. The strike, which has been in effect since March 11, involves members of the Unite Union protesting against proposed job cuts and pay reductions, leading to approximately 17,000 tonnes of rubbish accumulating on the streets.

In the wake of this industrial action, residents have reported an unsettling increase in the presence of large rats, which some describe as being "the size of cats," taking advantage of the uncollected refuse. The ongoing heatwave, with temperatures remaining around 20°C, is feared to exacerbate the situation, as experts warn that warmer weather can lead to faster breeding rates among these rodents.

Infectious disease expert Dr Elizabeth Sherida, speaking to The Telegraph, expressed concern about the risks of Leptospirosis, also known as Weil's disease, which can be contracted through exposure to rat urine. She highlighted that individuals who handle contaminated rubbish could unwittingly expose themselves to the disease, with symptoms ranging from high fever to severe organ damage in more serious cases. "Most people don’t know they have been exposed to rat urine," Dr Sherida noted, emphasising the need for caution when handling waste.

Additionally, Mat Stewart, a waste management expert, echoed these concerns and warned that the pest situation could escalate further with fly and maggot infestations potentially following the rat problem if the waste is not addressed. Studies suggest that the conditions created by the strike may enable several diseases carried by rats to thrive, influencing public health adversely.

The Birmingham City Council has reported that ongoing picketing outside refuse depots has hindered their ability to manage waste collections effectively, which typically amounts to over 500,000 collections a week. The council asserts that their contingency plans can only handle up to 360,000 collections due to the blockade of their vehicles by protesting workers. Councillor John Cotton, leader of Birmingham City Council, stated that the situation is causing significant distress to residents and noted, "I respect the right to strike and protest; however, actions on the picket line must be lawful."

Public health experts have also indicated that while the situation poses considerable risks, especially concerning Leptospirosis and hantavirus—another disease associated with rat infestations—the overall incidence rates remain relatively low in the UK. Nevertheless, the presence of such unhealthy conditions in Birmingham is prompting an urgent need for action to prevent potential outbreaks of these diseases.

The city is under pressure as the rubbish crisis has now risen to a level that has been discussed in Parliament, with calls for intervention and support. The council plans to bolster its clean-up efforts by deploying an additional 35 vehicles and crews to expedite the collection of waste. As the city grapples with these challenges, residents continue to express their frustration over the health and environmental implications of this waste management crisis.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20009/waste_and_recycling/3020/waste_and_recycling_industrial_action_-_faq_for_residents> - This URL provides information on the ongoing strike by Unite Union members and the declaration of a major incident by Birmingham City Council to address the waste management crisis.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/leptospirosis> - This URL offers information on Leptospirosis (Weil's disease), highlighting its causes, symptoms, and prevention, supporting Dr. Elizabeth Sherida's concerns.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rats-and-mice-rats-infestation/> - This URL explains the risks associated with rat infestations, including diseases like Leptospirosis, and supports warnings about the health implications of uncollected waste in Birmingham.
* <https://www.publichealth punkforgov.org/article/health-effects-of-rat-infestation/> - Unfortunately, this specific URL is not available. Instead, general information on rat infestations can be found through health organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) or local public health sites discussing rodent-related health risks.
* <https://ukparliament CommandTypereprted.barwould discussobioapp UKparETH sanitation.pdf> - Unfortunately, this specific URL is not available. However, discussions in Parliament regarding environmental and health issues can often be found through the UK Parliament's official website or publications related to environmental health.
* <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/6241/council-leader-responds-to-waste-crisis> - This URL provides statements from Birmingham City Council leaders, such as Councillor John Cotton, regarding the waste crisis and efforts to resolve it.
* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/birmingham-bin-strikes-deadly-disease-35008279> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/cannibal-rats-the-size-cats-35006862> - Please view link - unable to able to access data