# Birmingham’s bin strike creates health risks amid growing rubbish piles



Birmingham continues to grapple with mounting refuse piling up on its streets following an ongoing strike by bin workers, which began on 11 March. The city's streets are now strewn with over 21,000 tonnes of uncollected rubbish, creating sizeable trash mountains that have become feeding grounds for rats and seagulls, contributing to public health concerns due to the potential spread of disease.

The bin workers, who overwhelmingly rejected a strike-ending deal with Birmingham City Council as of Tuesday, have prolonged the stoppage, leaving no clear resolution in sight. The accumulating waste has attracted increased populations of rats and seagulls, which have reportedly become larger in size and pose risks beyond the immediate nuisance.

Rats are known carriers of several diseases transmissible to humans, predominantly through their urine and faeces. Among the most severe is Weil’s disease, which can, in extreme cases, be fatal. Infection typically occurs when individuals swim or come into contact with contaminated water through cuts or grazes on the skin, with outbreaks often coinciding with major flooding events. Another bacterial illness linked to rodents is rat bite fever, transmitted through bites or scratches inflicted by rodents, which, while treatable, can become serious if left unaddressed. Furthermore, Seoul hantavirus, a disease contracted by inhaling aerosolised particles of rat urine or faeces, has garnered attention for its severity and was notably implicated in the death of the actress Betsy Blair, wife of actor Gene Hackman.

Seagulls feeding on the refuse mounds also present health concerns. These birds are capable of harbouring and transmitting bacterial infections, such as Salmonella and Campylobacter, to humans after interacting with waste sites. There have been documented cases where these birds have spread disease, including an incident involving contamination through a pecked milk bottle.

In light of the overflowing rubbish and growing vermin populations, the city council has introduced measures at recycling and waste disposal sites, including strict online booking systems and extended opening hours until 10pm, to facilitate residents' efforts to dispose of waste independently. However, demand for these booking slots has outstripped supply. Some residents and officials have expressed frustration over difficulties securing appointments.

Liz Clements, councillor for Birmingham’s Bournville & Cotteridge ward, has suggested that supporters of the strike are engaging in “obstructive block booking” of these slots. She claims that this tactic is deliberately employed to exacerbate the rubbish accumulation as a form of protest, hindering residents’ attempts to manage waste and thereby strengthening the negotiating position of the striking bin workers.

The situation has already drawn complaints from residents who describe encountering “rats the size of cats” scurrying amidst the waste piles. The increase in vermin populations heightens concerns regarding the potential for disease transmission in urban areas.

The Daily Star is reporting that despite the council's efforts and the public's frustrations, the strike remains unresolved, and the city continues to face the challenges posed by the ongoing accumulation of uncollected refuse and its adverse effects on the urban environment.

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

## References

* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/15/tuhl-a15.html> - Supports the ongoing strike by Birmingham bin workers and the rejection of a proposed deal by Birmingham City Council.
* <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2025/april/birmingham-bin-workers-overwhelmingly-reject-partial-offer-from-council> - Confirms bin workers' overwhelming rejection of the council's offer due to inadequate protections against pay cuts.
* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/17/atve-a17.html> - Details the escalated strikebreaking measures by Birmingham City Council and the Starmer government amid the dispute.
* <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-and-a/detail/leptospirosis> - Provides information on Weil's disease, a severe rodent-borne disease that can be fatal, highlighting the health risks associated with rat infestations.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/index.html> - Supports the information about Seoul hantavirus, a disease contracted through inhalation of aerosolized rodent waste particles.