# Birmingham faces public health risks as refuse strike leads to vermin surge



Birmingham is currently facing a significant public health concern as towering piles of uncollected rubbish continue to accumulate across the city. The situation has escalated following a citywide bin workers’ strike, which began on 11 March and shows no immediate resolution. The refusal of refuse collectors to accept a strike-ending deal with Birmingham City Council on Tuesday has led to a substantial build-up of waste, now measured at more than 21,000 tonnes.

This mounting rubbish has attracted large numbers of rats and seagulls, both species feeding off the waste and reportedly increasing in size. These animals are not only physical nuisances; they also pose serious health risks to the city’s residents due to their capacity to spread diseases.

Rats are known carriers of several pathogens harmful to humans. One of the primary diseases of concern is Weil’s disease, transmitted through contact with rat urine and capable of causing severe illness, and potentially fatal outcomes in extreme cases. Infection typically occurs when individuals come into contact with contaminated water through cuts or skin abrasions. This disease is more commonly associated with flood conditions, but the current refuse accumulation is facilitating its spread.

Additional illnesses linked to rats include rat bite fever, a bacterial infection resulting from rat bites or scratches. While treatable, it can also be fatal if untreated. A particularly notable disease is the Seoul hantavirus, which spreads through the inhalation of aerosols containing rat excreta. This virus has gained public attention in previous years due to its association with high-profile cases, including the death of Betty Hackman, wife of actor Gene Hackman.

Seagulls, which have also been amassing in the city, present their own risks. These birds can carry bacteria such as Salmonella and Campylobacter, which they acquire from feeding on the rubbish heaps. These bacteria are transmissible to humans and can cause gastrointestinal illnesses. A documented case from the past involves a seagull contaminating milk by pecking through a bottle, leading to the spread of infection.

The ongoing waste crisis has led to city council representatives raising concerns about efforts to exacerbate the situation. Liz Clements, councillor for Bournville & Cotteridge, has alleged that some supporters of the striking waste collectors are deliberately placing multiple advance bookings at local recycling centres, effectively preventing other residents from disposing of their own rubbish and causing further waste accumulation. She described this as "obstructive block booking," suggesting it is a tactic intended to pressure council negotiations.

In response to the challenges posed by the strike and booking sabotage, recycling centres in Birmingham have implemented strict online booking policies. Residents are restricted to two booked visits at a time, which can only be made no more than three days in advance. Additionally, some centres have extended their operational hours until 10pm to manage the increased demand. Despite these measures, many locals report difficulties securing booking slots, contributing to public frustration amid the escalating refuse piles.

The current situation has sparked widespread complaints among residents, with descriptions of unusually large rats, some reportedly “the size of cats,” proliferating in the environment. The Birmingham City Council continues efforts to negotiate with the striking workforce, while the growing refuse crisis raises concerns among public health officials and residents alike about the cleanliness and safety of the urban environment.

The Daily Star is reporting that as the strike continues into a fifth week, Birmingham faces an increasingly complex challenge balancing industrial action, waste management, and public health threats posed by disease-carrying vermin proliferating in the city’s streets.

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

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_bin_strike> - This source confirms the start date of the Birmingham bin workers strike on 11 March 2025 and explains the dispute involves pay cuts and elimination of Waste Recycling and Collection Officer (WRCO) roles, supporting the article's claims about the strike's background and scale.
* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/15/tuhl-a15.html> - This article details the refusal of Birmingham bin workers to end their strike despite a city council offer, supporting the claim that refuse collectors rejected a strike-ending deal, leading to ongoing rubbish accumulation.
* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/17/atve-a17.html> - This source describes the escalating strikebreaking operation by Birmingham City Council and the involvement of the Labour government, confirming the political context and ongoing negotiations amidst the strike, as referenced in the article.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-65138628> - A BBC news report about the mounting rubbish crisis in Birmingham during the bin strike, highlighting the buildup of waste and public health risks from vermin such as rats and seagulls feeding on uncollected rubbish.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/weils-disease/> - This NHS page explains Weil's disease, its transmission via contact with rat urine, and associated health risks, corroborating the article's description of the disease risks posed by rat infestations in Birmingham.