Before a bear-country hike

Pre-trip planning sheet | North American black and brown/grizzly bears

Complete this at home. It is a planning aid, not a guarantee of safety or a substitute for the destination's current instructions.

Destination / route and date

Ranger contact and emergency communication plan

Six checks before departure

[ ] Check current closures, bear advisories and the species present at your destination.

[ ] Check whether bear spray is permitted; read the exact canister label and expiry date.

[ ] Check holster access with your actual pack and layers. Rehearse handling only with an inert trainer, following its instructions.

[ ] Agree how the group will come together and who will help children. Rehearse calmly away from wildlife.

[ ] Arrange compliant storage for food, trash and scented items. Check your destination's approved-container list.

[ ] Save the route, ranger contact and emergency communication plan offline; leave a trip plan with a trusted contact.

Keep the response distinctions clear

Following is not contact. If it follows after you back away, stop retreating, group up and do not run. Keep your pack. Ready permitted bear spray and follow its label.

American black-bear attack. Do not play dead. Reach secure shelter if possible; otherwise fight back.

Defensive brown/grizzly contact. Play dead: face down, hands protecting neck, legs spread, pack on. Remain still until the bear leaves. If the attack persists, fight back.

Stalking attack or tent attack. If either species stalks and then attacks, or attacks you in your tent, fight back.

Guidance checked 23 October 2026: NPS Staying Safe Around Bears; Gates of the Arctic Bear Safety; Lake Clark Bear Safety; Alaska Department of Fish and Game Bear Country. Full references and qualifications are in the linked article.

After you reach safety

Blank encounter record | Do not delay leaving, emergency help or medical care to complete this sheet.

Trail / nearest junction / coordinates and time

People and bears present; cubs or carcass observed from a safe distance

What you observed, in order - avoid guessing the bear's intent

Your response; any food obtained, spray exposure or physical contact

Injuries, help requested and current safe location

Agency notified, contact person and follow-up instructions

Store this record privately and provide relevant facts to the responsible ranger or wildlife agency. It does not submit a report automatically.