



Salmonella Outbreak in Pine Siskins

Frequently Asked Questions

January 2021

How do I know if a bird may be sick from Salmonella?

Look for the following symptoms and behaviour:

- Birds appear puffed-up and lethargic (sleepy)
- Not alert or moving very much
- Often have seeds all over their beak
- May be dead birds nearby
- Heat seeking against your window or home

If you observe any of the indications above please attempt to contain the sick bird(s) if they are approachable.

Place a small towel or cloth gently over the bird, pick it up, and place into a ventilated and covered cardboard box. Place the contained bird in a location that is warm, dark and quiet and away from people and pets. Thoroughly wash your hands with warm, soapy water and call Wildlife Rescue at 604-526-7275. We will go through our Covid screening questions with you and then ask you to bring the bird to our hospital.



[Watch video of a Pine Siskin showing signs of Salmonella infection \[YouTube Link\].](#)

What happens to birds when we bring them in?

Our hospital staff do a full assessment and decide on an appropriate course of action from their findings.

Pine Siskins are highly susceptible to salmonella, likely due to their natural history, behavior, and anatomy.

If you find a Pine siskin exhibiting the symptoms of salmonella, it is best to bring that bird to the nearest Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre for assessment.

If the bird is confirmed to have salmonella it will reduce the spread of the disease in your area. This is because the sick or dead birds have a high likelihood of being picked up by predators, cats and unsuspecting humans increasing the risk of transmission of salmonella to them. The sick birds will continue to eat food, produce waste, and contaminate the other animals. Therefore, bringing the animal to a Rehabilitation Centre will stop this bird from transmitting disease

How do I dispose of Pine Siskins that have already passed away in my yard?

You can dispose of birds by deep burial to avoid scavenging, or you may double bag them and place them in the garbage. Placing them in your household green bin is not recommended at this time.

How is Salmonella transmitted?

Salmonellosis is transmitted via the fecal-oral route i.e., the accidental ingestion of Salmonella bacteria in contaminated food or water, and/or exposure to contaminated equipment (e.g. bird feeders).

Is there a proper way to maintain my feeder to prevent the disease?

If there is an outbreak of salmonella the best option is to remove the feeder and disperse the flock. If you choose to put up a feeder during a time when there is no known outbreak of diseases remember these points below:

- Clean your feeder with soap and water and then a 10% bleach solution 2 times a month or every 2 weeks.
- Wash your feeder outside in a space you do not use for your own dishes or food supplies.
- Monitor your feeder for pests, sick animals or cats lurking around.
- Always remember that wildlife can carry many different transmittable diseases. It is important to use diligent cleaning protocols at all times to keep yourself safe.
- Clean under your bird feeder daily or place a tray or other easily cleanable surface that can catch fallen seeds and waste so they can be disposed of.
- Avoid using tube feeders that require birds to stick their head inside openings to feed. Infected birds may leave discharge containing Salmonella bacteria on the sides of these openings, which could easily be transferred to healthy individuals.
- Feed limited amounts of seed i.e.–just enough for the day.
- Steer clear of platform feeders, because birds stand on them and tend to defecate where the food is, increasing the chances of disease spread.
- Finally, If you really enjoy watching the birds consider planting a [wildlife garden](#) outside your window. Even container gardens with wild native plants can attract and supply food and shelter for wildlife.

How should I clean my bird feeder?

Clean your bird feeders and bath two times a month with hot soapy water followed by a 3-minute soak in a 10% solution of domestic bleach (1-part sodium hypochlorite in 9 parts water) for disinfection. Feeders should be rinsed with clean cold water and dried thoroughly before refilling with fresh seed.

Spilled seed should be swept up and disposed of daily.



Pine Siskins at a tube feeder.

Brushes and equipment used to clean bird feeders and baths should not be used for any other purpose. Keep them outside and away from food preparation areas.

Wear rubber or disposable gloves when cleaning feeders and thoroughly wash hands and forearms afterwards with soap and water, especially before eating and drinking. Avoid handling sick or dead birds directly.

How long do I have to take my bird feeder down for? And why?

During a known outbreak of salmonellosis, it's important to remove bird feeders and baths for a minimum of two-weeks. Whenever possible, it's best to leave them down until warmer spring weather to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

When birds are forced to look for wild food sources, they naturally break off into smaller flocks. During a year with a known outbreak of salmonella this is obviously favourable.



A Pine Siskin in the wild.

Hummingbird feeders - can I leave them up?

If you have an active flock of Siskins, Hummingbird feeders should also be removed and properly sanitized and left down until they leave. If you do not see Pine Siskins, they can be left up with proper maintenance.

[Proper maintenance is vital – hummingbirds can be impacted by a fungus if feeders aren't properly maintained.](#)

Suet feeders - can I leave them up?

Siskins will occasionally use suet feeders. If you have an active flock of Siskins, suet feeders should also be removed and properly sanitized and left down until they leave. If you do not see Pine Siskins, they can be left up with proper maintenance.

Is a “wildlife garden” okay?

A wildlife garden serves as a sustainable haven for surrounding wildlife. It is an ideal way to provide habitat and food, while minimizing the spread of disease, to wild birds.

[Visit the Canadian Wildlife Federation's website for tips on gardening for wildlife.](#)

What other species are susceptible to Salmonella?

Salmonella can occur in all species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. We primarily see outbreaks in Pine Siskins in the Lower Mainland, but all animals are potentially at risk.



American Goldfinches at a feeder with Pine Siskins.

Important to note: Salmonella is a Zoonotic disease. It is transmissible to humans as well as our companion animals. It's important to thoroughly wash your hands after contacting birds or anything birds may have touched.

I found a sick bird! What do I do?

Bring the bird in to your local wildlife rehabilitator!

Wildlife Rescue Association of British Columbia
5216 Glencarin Drive, Burnaby, BC V5B 3C1
Support Centre: (604) 526-7275
info@wildliferescue.ca

If you are not located in the Lower Mainland, please contact your nearest wildlife rehabilitator.



A Pine Siskin in care at Wildlife Rescue.

For updates on this outbreak, follow along on social media:

 [wildliferescue](https://www.facebook.com/wildliferescue)

 [wildliferescuebc](https://www.instagram.com/wildliferescuebc)

 [WRAofBC](https://twitter.com/WRAofBC)