

Most Common Questions About Chronic Wasting Disease

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic wasting disease is a progressive neurological disease and belongs to a family of diseases called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. CWD is the variation that occurs in cervids (deer and elk).

It is caused by an unusually shaped protein called a prion. Prions are not a living thing like a virus or bacteria, but are able to replicate and destroy the brain of an infected animal, causing a sponge-like appearance in the brain tissue.

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms include abnormal behavior, loss of weight, excessive drooling, drooping ears, teeth grinding and holding the head in a lowered position. Symptoms are not seen in deer younger than 18 months. The only way to make a definitive diagnosis is to examine the brain tissue of the animal in a laboratory.

Why is it important to fight CWD now?

CWD has moved into the Midwest (Wisconsin), the heart of white-tailed deer country. Deer populations are at record-high levels, and the disease is always fatal.

Where is it found?

CWD was first identified in Colorado in 1967. It has since been found in areas in Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Montana, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and most recently in Wisconsin and New Mexico. The disease has been found in both wild and captive cervids.

How common is CWD?

It is relatively rare, even in areas where it has been identified. In the Mt. Horeb, Wis. area it was found in about three percent of the sample. In Colorado, about one percent of elk in the core area are infected, with 5 to 15% of mule deer in the core area affected.

Can infected deer or elk be treated?

No. Once an animal contracts CWD it is fatal.

How is CWD transmitted?

While it is not known definitively, circumstantial, observational and experimental evidence suggest direct animal-to-animal contact, mother-to-offspring, contamination of feed or water via saliva, urine or feces, and environmental contamination may all be factors. CWD seems to be more prevalent in areas with high animal densities and areas where animals congregate at artificial feeding or water stations.

Can CWD infect livestock or other wildlife?

There is no evidence that it has or can be transmitted to livestock or other (non-cervid) animals. Bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope have not come down with the disease, even though they have been exposed to it under research conditions in western states.

Is it safe to eat venison from infected deer?

It's common sense that you should not consume any part of any animal known to be diseased. If you didn't know that a deer had CWD and you ate it, current evidence suggests that you would be safe. There is no evidence so far that CWD can jump species to humans. Prions accumulate in parts of infected animals that are not normally consumed.

Testing for CWD

The "Gold Standard" is the most accurate testing method available. It is a very complicated procedure and requires the trained eye of a veterinary or human pathologist. The entire process of slide preparation, staining, and rinsing, can take more than 50 hours in total, because the specific brain sample must soak and rinse for specific periods

of time. Tests currently used require a lengthy turnaround time, usually eight to ten weeks before results are known.

Is there a validated field test available that I can use when hunting?

No. While there is great interest in such a test it does not yet exist, and there won't be one in time for the 2002 hunting season. If anyone tells you they have a quick, reliable and easy test, you should question the source.

What is the hunter's role?

Deer experts feel that it is important to reduce the current record-size deer herds, and it is important for hunters to try to harvest as many deer as is legally allowed this hunting season.

If you observe or harvest a deer you are suspicious of, call your local DNR office immediately, so they can analyze the animal.

Post-Harvest Precautions

Health officials advise taking precautions when field dressing deer in areas where CWD is found:

- Wear rubber gloves
- Bone out meat from the animal
- Minimize handling the brain and spinal tissues
- Wash hands and tools thoroughly after field dressing
- Do not eat the brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils or lymph nodes
- If processing deer from the CWD management or eradication zones, keep meat and trimmings from each deer separate.

The Human Health Question

The World Health Organization and the federal Centers for Disease Control agree that there is no scientific evidence CWD can infect humans.

However, WHO also says no part of a deer or elk with evidence of CWD should be eaten by people or other animals. (It is common sense that you should not consume any animal known to be diseased.) Over 16 years of monitoring in the infected area in Colorado has resulted in no evidence that CWD has transferred to people.

Need More Information?

The internet hosts numerous websites about CWD. Doing a search for "Chronic Wasting Disease" will provide you with the latest information about CWD. State and federal agencies are also excellent sources of information about the disease.

This information provided by:



1-800-274-5471

www.whitetailsunlimited.com

Common-Sense Precautions for Handling and Processing Deer

Chronic Wasting Disease is a fatal neurodegenerative illness of deer and elk. It is characterized by accumulations of abnormal prions — forms of protein — that differ in shape from normal proteins that occur naturally in the brains of deer and elk. The abnormal prions are very difficult to destroy; they can survive many traditional sterilization techniques, including gamma and ultraviolet radiation. While they don't have DNA nor RNA, they are able to transform normal proteins to their own image, creating spongelike holes in the brain. Because of their long incubation periods, prion diseases have been mistaken for "slow viruses."

According to the World Health Organization, **there is no evidence that the disease passes to humans.** To reduce the risk of exposure the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection recommends the following guidelines for removing prions from venison.

FIELD DRESSING

- 🦠 Wear rubber or latex gloves.
- 🦠 Do not use household knives or utensils.
- 🦠 Remove all internal organs and minimize contact with them.
- 🦠 Clean knives, counters, and equipment of residue, and disinfect with a 50/50 solution of household chlorine bleach and water, and dry.
- 🦠 Soak knives in disinfectant one hour.

CUTTING AND PROCESSING

(Follow field dressing guidelines as well)

- 🦠 Do not cut into or through bones.
- 🦠 Do not cut through the spinal column, except to remove the head. Use a knife designated only for that purpose.
- 🦠 Bone out the meat and remove all fat and connective tissue (the weblike membranes attached to the meat).
- 🦠 If processing deer from the CWD management or eradication zones, keep meat and trimmings from each deer separate.

CONSUMPTION

- 🦠 Never eat a deer's brain, eyeballs, tonsils, spinal cord, spleen or lymph nodes.

ORGANS TO BE AVOIDED AND DISCARDED

