



CWD — KEEPING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a neurological (brain and nervous system) disease found in deer and elk in certain geographic locations in North America. CWD belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) or prion diseases; it attacks the brains of infected deer and elk and produces small lesions that result in death. While CWD is similar to mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, there is no known relationship between it and any other TSE of animals or people.

How is it spread?

While it's not known exactly how CWD is spread, it is believed that the agent responsible for the disease may be spread both directly (animal to animal contact) and indirectly (soil or other surface to animal) most likely through the saliva and feces of infected animals.

Where has it been found?

CWD is known to infect wild deer and elk in Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Wyoming, Alberta and Saskatchewan. It has been diagnosed in captive herds in Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma, Kansas, Minnesota, New York, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Alberta and Saskatchewan. **CWD has not been found in Pennsylvania.**

Is it dangerous to humans?

There is no evidence that the agent of CWD affects humans. However, public health officials recommend that human exposure to the CWD agent be avoided as they continue to research the disease.

How can I tell if a deer has CWD?

Infected animals may not show symptoms in the early stages. However, as the disease progresses, infected animals begin to lose body functions and display abnormal behaviors, such as staggering or standing with poor posture. Animals may display an exaggerated wide stance or carry their head and ears lowered. Infected animals become emaciated (thus wasting disease) and appear to be in very poor body condition, often drooling excessively. Infected animals often stand near water and drink large quantities. It is important to note that these symptoms are characteristic of diseases other than CWD.

What should I do if I see a deer displaying CWD symptoms?

You should accurately document the location of the animal and immediately contact the nearest Game Commission Region Office. Do not attempt to disturb, kill or remove the animal.

What precautions should hunters take?

In states like Pennsylvania where CWD has not been found, hunters should shoot only healthy-appearing animals, wear rubber gloves for field-dressing and wash hands and forearms thoroughly when done.

Hunters heading to a state with a history of CWD should become familiar with that state's wildlife regulations and guidelines for the transportation of harvested game animals as well as the PGC Cervid Parts Importation Ban. Wildlife officials have suggested that hunters in areas where CWD is known to exist follow these guidelines to prevent the spread of the disease:

- Do not shoot, handle or consume an animal that appears sick.
- Wear rubber or latex gloves when field-dressing.
- Bone out the meat from your animal.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments after field-dressing.
- Ask your deer processor to process your meat individually, without meat from other animals, or process your own meat.
- Have your animal processed in the area of the state where it was harvested so high-risk body parts can be properly disposed of. It is illegal to bring these parts into the state from areas listed in the PGC ban.
- Bring back to Pennsylvania only low-risk materials: meat without the backbone, skull plate with attached antlers if no visible brain or spinal cord material is present, tanned hide or raw hide with no visible brain or spinal cord material present, cape if no visible brain or spinal cord material is present, upper canine teeth if no root structure or other soft material is present, and finished taxidermy mounts.
- Don't consume high-risk body parts. Normal field-dressing, coupled with boning out a carcass, will remove most, if not all, of these body parts. Cutting away all fatty tissue will remove remaining lymph nodes.
- Have your animal tested, and do not consume meat from any animal that tests positive for the disease.

Should I be concerned about hunting in Pennsylvania and elsewhere?

Concerns about CWD are no reason to not enjoy hunting in Pennsylvania. Take the normal precautions recommended when field-dressing wild game. Pennsylvania is stepping up its CWD surveillance efforts and at this point **CWD has not been found in the state.** If you plan to hunt in a state where CWD is known to exist, contact that state's wildlife agency for guidance.

Is the meat safe to eat?

While the agent that produces chronic wasting disease in deer and elk has not been positively identified, there is strong evidence to suggest that abnormally shaped proteins, called prions, accumulate in certain parts of infected animals — the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils and spleen. Based on these findings, as a precaution, hunters are recommended to not eat meat from animals known to be infected with CWD. Hunters in CWD areas also are advised to bone out their meat and to not consume those parts where prions likely accumulate.

What can hunters do?

Hunters need to tell political leaders of their concerns about CWD. Indicate your support for increased financial assistance to state wildlife and agricultural agencies to combat CWD. Encourage state officials to support the important steps taken to prevent the introduction of CWD. And finally, because any concentration of deer or elk assists in the spread of diseases, stop supplemental feeding programs.

Where can I learn more?

Hunters are encouraged to contact state wildlife agencies where they plan to hunt for more information on the status of CWD in that state. Most states, including Pennsylvania, now have up-to-date information on CWD on their websites. The Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance website (www.cwd-info.org) is frequently updated with new information.

Processors and Taxidermists

If you are presented with deer or elk body parts harvested by hunters in CWD-infected areas, please contact the nearest Game Commission Region Office for guidance. A PGC representative may want to collect tissues, provide proper processing and disposal procedures, and information to educate hunters. Can hunters have deer tested?

CWD testing of healthy appearing hunter-harvested deer or elk is available through the New Bolton Center. Hunters who wish to have their deer tested can make arrangements to do so by calling **610-444-5800**. Unhealthy appearing animals should not be killed, but reported to the Game Commission Region Office nearest you.