

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) affects the brain and nervous system of infected cervids (deer, elk and moose) eventually resulting in death.

Current Status:

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been detected in three locations in Pennsylvania: a captive deer farm in Adams County ([fall 2012](#)); free-ranging deer in Blair and Bedford counties ([2012 firearms season](#)); and a captive deer farm in Jefferson county ([spring 2014](#)). Following the detection of CWD in both captive and free-ranging deer in Pennsylvania, an [executive order](#) was issued by the Game Commission to establish Disease Management Areas (DMAs). Within DMAs, rehabilitation of cervids (deer, elk and moose); the use or possession of cervid urine-based attractants in an outdoor setting; the removal of high-risk cervid parts; and the feeding of wild, free-ranging cervids are prohibited. Increased testing continues in these areas to determine the distribution of the disease. Newly confirmed cases will alter the boundaries of DMAs as the Game Commission continues to manage the disease and minimize its affect on free ranging cervids.

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a member of the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) family of diseases that includes Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or Mad Cow Disease in cattle; Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans; and Scrapie in sheep and goats. It was first recognized in Colorado deer and elk in 1967. The specific cause of CWD is believed to be an abnormal prion (protein infectious particle) that is found in the brain, the nervous system, and some lymphoid tissues of infected animals. It causes death of brain cells and, on a microscopic level, holes in the brain tissue.

What animals get CWD?

CWD has been diagnosed in white-tailed deer, mule deer, black-tailed deer and hybrids thereof, as well as elk, red deer, and moose. **There is no evidence that CWD is transmissible to humans or traditional livestock.** However, it is recommended that meat from CWD-positive animals not be consumed.

Why should I stop feeding deer?

Because any concentration of deer or elk assists in the spread of diseases, immediately stop supplemental feeding programs. For more information, read [Please Don't Feed the Deer](#). (.pdf)

What is being done to manage CWD in Pennsylvania?

Several state and federal agencies, including the Game Commission, Pennsylvania departments of Agriculture (PDA), Health (PDH), and Environmental Protection (DEP), and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) completed a response plan which details methods of prevention, surveillance and response designed to manage CWD. Activities designed to reduce the risks associated with this disease are ongoing. Surveillance for CWD and other diseases has been ongoing in Pennsylvania since 1998 and will continue in order to understand the prevalence and distribution of the disease.

What are high-risk carcass parts?

High-risk carcass parts, where the CWD prion (causative agent) concentrates are: head (including brain, tonsils, eyes and all lymph nodes); spinal cord; spleen; upper canine teeth, if root structure is present; any object or article containing visible brain or spinal cord material; unfinished taxidermy mounts or brain-tanned hides.

Why are there restrictions on the movement of high-risk parts?

Although CWD has been detected in both captive and free ranging deer, the Game Commission's goal continues to be to prevent further introductions of CWD into our state and to prevent spread within the state. The movement of high-risk carcass parts (brain, spinal cord, lymphoid tissues) is a potential avenue through which CWD could be spread. Many states, including Pennsylvania, have developed regulations to prohibit the importation of high-risk carcass parts

from [CWD endemic states and provinces](#). [Pennsylvania's importation ban](#) prohibits the importation of high-risk carcass parts from these areas. Those hunting within Pennsylvania's CWD-positive areas are also subject to [high-risk parts movement restrictions](#). These parts may not be removed from the designated Disease Management Areas (DMAs).