

Chronic Wasting Disease



What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is found in some deer and elk populations in North America. CWD belongs to a family of diseases known as *transmissible spongiform encephalopathies*. Although CWD is in the same family of diseases as bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, and scrapie in sheep, it is a distinct disease that has only been found in deer and elk. The specific cause of the disease is believed to be an abnormal prion (protein infectious particle) that is found in the brain, central nervous system and some lymphoid tissues of infected animals.

Is CWD transmissible to humans?

There is currently no evidence that CWD is linked to disease in humans. There has been considerable research on this issue, and research is ongoing.

Are domestic animals at risk for CWD?

There is no indication to date that CWD is a threat to domestic animals or livestock other than deer or elk. There have been no reports of CWD in dogs, cats or other domestic animals.

What are the symptoms of CWD?

CWD causes the infected animal to lose weight, display abnormal behavior, become disoriented and experience a loss of bodily functions before death occurs. There is no known cure for CWD and it is always fatal.

When and where was CWD first discovered in New York State?

CWD was first discovered in New York in two captive white-tailed deer herds in Oneida County during routine testing in March 2005. CWD has since been discovered in wild deer in Oneida County.

Where does CWD occur?

CWD is a disease that is unique to North America. As of April 2005, CWD has been found in wild deer and elk in Colorado, Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. In captive deer and elk, it has been found in Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

What is the state doing to address CWD in New York?

DEC has established a CWD containment area in Oneida and Madison counties and has filed regulations to ensure the proper handling of deer and to prevent further spread of CWD in the wild herd. DEC may establish additional containment areas if more cases of CWD are found.

Within CWD containment areas, regulations prohibit the movement of certain animal parts out of the containment area, establish mandatory check stations for deer taken by hunters in the containment area, prohibit possession of any deer killed by a motor vehicle, and prohibit the collection, sale, possession or transport of deer or elk urine taken from the containment area.

In addition to the requirements listed for the containment area, statewide regulations specify record keeping and reporting requirements for taxidermists and require measures to prevent live deer from coming in contact with any materials, including taxidermy materials, that may contain the infectious agent that causes CWD. There are also statewide restrictions on rehabilitation of wild white-tailed deer at facilities that house live deer, and restrictions on the sale of deer feed.

DEC has been conducting routine testing for CWD in wild deer throughout the state since the fall of 2002. More than 3,700 deer, including more than 300 from Oneida County, have been tested. DEC will continue its routine testing throughout the state and implement an enhanced testing program in Oneida County.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets monitors the health and movement of all captive deer and elk in New York State. Through its CWD Enhanced Surveillance and Monitoring Program, captive deer and elk herd owners have been required to conduct routine sampling and testing in captive herds throughout the state since 2004.

How is CWD transmitted?

Research indicates that infected deer and elk transmit the disease through animal to animal contact, and feed or water sources contaminated with bodily excretions. The transmission may be enhanced when deer and elk are congregated around man-made feed and water stations.

How soon after CWD exposure do signs of infection appear?

The incubation period of CWD is variable, ranging from several months to several years. Outward signs of the disease do not occur until the animal reaches the last stages of the disease, which may be several years after first exposure.

Are there health risks for hunters in handling deer?

There is no evidence that hunters are at risk of acquiring CWD from handling deer. Depending on how an animal is handled, there may be a risk of other diseases including rabies. Hunters should observe normal precautions around any animals, such as avoiding sick or strange-acting animals.

Hunters must report to the local health department any potential rabies exposures such as an animal bite or scratch, or contact between a person's eyes, nose, or mouth (mucous membranes) or fresh open wound and an animal's saliva, brain, or other central nervous system tissue.

What should be done if someone sees a sick deer?

A deer that appears sick or abnormal could have a number of possible diseases, including rabies. If there has been direct human contact, the animal must be reported to the local health department. After the animal has been humanely euthanized, the local health department will send tissue samples to the New York State Department of Health's Rabies Laboratory for rabies testing. Animals that are negative for rabies will be submitted for CWD testing. If there has been no human contact, the sick animal should be reported to the nearest New York State Department of Environmental Conservation office.

Are there any precautions for handling, processing or eating meat from deer?

To minimize the risk of transmission of any infectious diseases when handling or processing deer, the following precautions are recommended:

- Do not handle or eat any deer that appear sick, act strangely, or are found dead.
 - Wear rubber gloves when field dressing game.
 - Wash instruments and any parts of the body exposed to animal tissues, blood, urine, etc. thoroughly with soap and water. As an additional precaution against CWD, you can soak cleaned knives and tools for one hour in a fresh solution of household chlorine bleach (unscented) mixed with an equal amount of water (e.g., one quart bleach with one quart of water — a 50 percent solution), air dry, then rinse with clean water. Wipe down cleaned counters and other surfaces with 50 percent bleach solution and allow them to air dry.
 - Request that animals are processed individually, without mixing or coming into contact with meat from other animals.
 - Although no CWD risk to humans has been identified from consumption of venison, in general, consumption of organ meat (including brain, spinal cord, and other nervous tissue, spleen, pancreas, eyes, tonsils and lymph nodes) may pose a greater risk of infection with a number of diseases, such as rabies. Hunters should have deer boned out and have as much fat, connective tissue and lymph nodes removed as possible
 - Out of an abundance of caution, people should not consume a known or suspected CWD positive animal.
- For more information about handling, processing, or eating meat from deer or elk in other states, contact the agriculture, wildlife, or health agencies of those states.

Are there any risks from deer waste or products?

Although there is no indication of human infection due to contact with deer waste or products related to CWD-infected deer or elk, there are other diseases of concern, such as rabies. The following general disease control precautions are recommended:

- Avoid contact with animal bodily waste material and clean up animal waste from areas frequented by children.
- If there is skin contact with animal waste, wash the area with soap and water immediately.

For additional Information:



New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation
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www.dec.state.ny.us



New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Nathan L. Rudgers, Commissioner
www.agmkt.state.ny.us

Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance
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www.nyhealth.gov/nysdoh/zoonoses/cwd.htm www.cwd-info.org