



HOW HUNTERS CAN HELP MANAGE CWD

Fact Sheet #44

If you hunt big game in North America, you have probably heard of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and the associated concerns, facts, and myths surrounding this disease. CWD is an infectious, always-fatal disease that has progressively spread across North America's captive and wild members of the deer family. See MDWG Fact Sheet #39 for information about this disease.

CWD and its impact on the management of deer and elk populations is the focus of ongoing and important research. While we do not have all the answers yet, enough details are emerging to inform and guide basic management actions. CWD has already been incorporated into several deer and elk management plans and continues to alter the way we handle harvested deer. Misinformation has caused confusion and, in some instances, disregard for the seriousness of CWD. It is vital that hunters understand the severity of this disease and take an active role to contain and manage CWD for the future of our hunting heritage and the conservation of our mule deer populations.

POTENTIAL POPULATION MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

CWD may result in significant changes in the way agencies manage both infected and uninfected herds within their jurisdiction. Wildlife agencies may require a quarantine of certain deer parts (head, spine, bones, internal organs); require appropriate disposal; restrict movement of these parts from infected areas; prohibit the use of bait, scents, or lures; or change management strategies to maintain prevalence (% of the population infected) at low levels. Many agencies have also stopped translocating deer and in some cases have changed hunt structures to reduce deer densities in infected areas. Although not always popular, science and management experience indicate if we want to control the disease, then lowering the density of deer on the landscape and proportion of mature bucks in a herd may reduce transmission rates. Active support and participation by hunters play an important role in reducing the chance of further spread to uninfected herds. Hunting is a critical component of management strategies designed to limit CWD.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO HUNTING

Hunter opportunity has also been affected by CWD. Reduced deer densities and fewer mature bucks can reduce the number of deer tags offered and the opportunity to harvest a mature buck. Restrictions on the movement of animals or animal parts can require additional planning, preparation, and post-hunt effort to de-bone and care for meat. Health authorities recommend deer be tested for CWD and meat not be consumed until results are received, even if test results take weeks to arrive. Not knowing or understanding the law can result in violations, which can affect future hunting privileges. Additionally, bans on the use of bait, supplemental feed, lures, or urine-based scents are now common, as are restrictions on transporting deer carcasses and some parts between jurisdictions. In some states and provinces, taxidermy shops and meat processing plants are affected, with some requiring a negative test before processing or refusing to accept animals from CWD-positive areas. These and other changes to regulations are all realities hunters have to deal with because of CWD.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A DEER WITH CWD

Many illnesses can cause the same signs as late-stage CWD—skinny condition with ribs showing, droopy ears, drooling, lack of awareness, or otherwise odd behavior. However, because physical signs do not appear until late in the course of disease, most CWD-infected animals look and act healthy. The only way to definitively diagnose CWD is by testing certain tissues in a laboratory.

WHAT CAN HUNTERS DO TO HELP?

Mule deer managers need hunters to help implement harvest-based management strategies to limit CWD. Do not harvest or consume any animal that is acting abnormal or appears to be sick. Contact authorities if you see sick deer so they can investigate and sample the deer. Despite no evidence of CWD infecting people, if your harvested animal tests positive for CWD, human health officials recommend the meat not be consumed (cooking or freezing meat will not destroy the infectious agent). The prions that cause the disease can occur in high concentrations in brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils, and lymph nodes, but can be found in lower concentrations in the meat. Hunters should also not engage in feeding and baiting, even where legal, as increasing deer interactions and concentrating deer around feed sites will increase the likelihood of spreading disease.



The following five simple steps will help limit the spread and prevalence of CWD.

- 1. Know Before You Go** – Determine whether CWD has been detected in the area you are hunting and if there are any special regulations about testing, carcass transportation, and disposal of inedible parts. Follow all regulations, not only in the area you are hunting, but also areas you travel through and where you reside.
- 2. Be Part of the Solution** – Help implement active measures prescribed by scientists and managers to control CWD in deer herds. Using hunting to reduce deer density and age structure is reversible if no longer needed in the future. Once the disease reaches high prevalence in a herd, it may never again be healthy, abundant, and resilient to other environmental stresses.
- 3. Transport and Dispose of Carcasses Responsibly** – Follow the rules on carcass disposal and importation of harvested parts set by your agency in your hunting area and home jurisdiction. This may include not disposing untested or CWD-positive deer carcasses or bones anywhere except in approved landfills, specific drop-off places, or dumpsters provided for deer parts. Even if not required by law, it is good practice to bone out the meat from an animal where it was harvested to reduce the risk of spreading the disease to new areas.
- 4. Test Your Harvested Animal** – If the management agency is conducting CWD surveillance where you are hunting, get your animal tested. In addition to knowing whether your deer is positive for CWD, testing helps managers monitor prevalence and detect new areas of infection early when there is a better chance to slow the spread of the disease. Tissues collected for testing are located in the head and neck.
- 5. Clean It** – If you keep the head, after testing completely clean the skull or skull plate so it is free of tissue. Make sure to clean your hands, knives, tools, and other processing equipment. A five-minute soak in a 40% bleach solution (two parts bleach to three parts water) should inactivate the infectious agent.

As hunters, we have an obligation to help limit the spread of this disease to new areas. CWD is here to stay and has the potential to seriously affect deer populations and our hunting heritage. We must do all we can to keep it out of areas that do not have it, keep it local, and keep prevalence low.

More information about mule deer and CWD can be found at: cwd-info.org