



CWD and Deer Processors

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a contagious, always-fatal disease that infects species in the deer and elk family. It is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE). Other diseases in the TSE family include 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 mule deer in Colorado in the 1960s. Evidence suggests the cause of CWD to be an abnormal prion (proteinaceous infectious particle). Prions are concentrated in the brain, nervous system, and lymphoid tissues of infected animals. The disease causes death of brain cells resulting in microscopic holes in the brain tissue. CWD-infected deer, on average, do not display clinical symptoms of disease for 18 to 24 months.

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, moose, and reindeer.

Is CWD dangerous to humans?

There is no evidence that CWD is transmissible to humans or traditional livestock. However, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that *“To date, there have been no reported cases of CWD infection in people. However, animal studies suggest CWD poses a risk to some types of non-human primates, like monkeys, that eat meat from CWD-infected animals or come in contact with brain or body fluids from infected deer or elk. These studies raise concerns that there may also be a risk to people. Since 1997, the World Health Organization has recommended that it is important to keep the agents of all known prion diseases from entering the human food chain.”*

Is the meat of a CWD-positive deer safe to eat?

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that people DO NOT eat meat from animals that test positive for CWD. From the CDC website: *“Animal studies suggest CWD poses a risk to some types of non-human primates, like monkeys, that eat meat from CWD-infected animals or come in contact with brain or body fluids from infected deer or elk. These studies raise concerns that there may also be a risk to people. . . If CWD could spread to people, it would most likely be through eating of infected deer and elk...[T]o date, no CWD infections have been reported in people. . . If your animal tests positive for CWD, do not eat meat from that animal.”*

More information and further recommendations can be found on the Center for Disease Control website.

Where has CWD been found?

In Pennsylvania, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been detected in several parts of the state. It was first detected in a captive facility in Disease Management Area (DMA) 1 in Adams County in 2012. DMA 1 has since been eliminated. CWD remains in Disease Management Areas 2, 3 and 4. DMA 2 covers all or portions of Indiana, Cambria, Clearfield, Centre, Union, Snyder, Blair, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, Perry, Cumberland, Westmoreland, Somerset, Bedford, Fulton, Franklin, and Adams counties. DMA 3 covers portions of Jefferson, Clearfield, Indiana, Armstrong, and Clarion counties. And DMA 4 covers portions of Berks, Lancaster, and Lebanon counties. CWD has not been found in Pennsylvania’s elk herd.

In addition, CWD has been detected in wild or captive deer and/or elk in many other states and provinces. [A listing of states and provinces where CWD has been identified](#), as well as a map of Pennsylvania DMAs can be found on the CWD page of the Game Commission’s website (www.pgc.pa.gov). Use this shortcut to get right to the CWD pages <http://bit.ly/PGC-CWD>.

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How is CWD spread?

CWD is transmitted both directly through animal-to-animal contact and indirectly through food and soil contaminated with bodily secretions including feces, urine, and saliva. Contaminated carcasses or high-risk carcass parts may also spread the disease indirectly through environmental contamination. Prions are very stable in the environment and remain infectious for decades.

What is being done to manage CWD in Pennsylvania?

With input from the public and various agencies and organizations, the Game Commission developed a Pennsylvania Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan. This plan sets forth the goals, objectives, and strategies necessary to continue and improve efforts to manage CWD within the Commonwealth. Certain regulations are also in place to minimize risks of spreading the disease. The Game Commission annually samples free-ranging white-tailed deer and elk to monitor CWD expansion and prevalence. The Department of Agriculture is responsible for oversight of captive deer and other cervid facilities.

How can I tell if a deer or elk has CWD?

Animals infected with CWD do not show signs of infection for 12 or more months; many infected animals look completely healthy. Late stage symptoms of CWD-infected animals include an extreme loss of body condition; excessive drinking, urination, salivation, and drooling; and behavioral and neurologic changes such as repetitive walking patterns, droopy ears, a wide-based stance, and listlessness. Some animals lose their fear of humans and predators. There is no known cure. It is important to note that these symptoms are characteristic of diseases other than CWD.

What are high-risk carcass parts?

High-risk carcass parts, where the CWD prion (causative agent) concentrates are: head (including brain, tonsils, eyes, and lymph nodes); spinal cord/backbone (vertebra); spleen; skull plate with attached antlers, if visible brain or spinal cord material is present; cape, if visible brain or spinal cord material is present; upper canine teeth, if root structure or other soft material is present; any object or article containing visible brain or spinal cord material; and brain-tanned hide.

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

Regulations prohibit the removal or export of any high-risk parts or materials from cervids harvested, taken, or killed, including by vehicular accident, within any Disease Management Area (DMA) established within the Commonwealth. Regulations also prohibit the importation of any high-risk parts or materials from cervids harvested, taken, or killed in areas where CWD has been detected. 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 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 [states and provinces with CWD infected deer](#). A list of areas from where the importation of high-risk parts is prohibited can be found on the Game Commission's CWD web page: <http://bit.ly/PGC-CWD>.

What carcass parts are safe to move?

The following cervid parts may be safely transported into and within Pennsylvania: meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached; cleaned hides without the head; skull plates and/or antlers cleaned of all brain tissue; upper canine teeth without soft tissue; or finished taxidermy mounts. These parts may be moved out of Pennsylvania's Disease Management Areas.

More Information

More information on CWD and a listing of states and provinces where CWD has been identified, as well a map of Pennsylvania DMAs can be found on the CWD page of the Game Commission's website (www.pgc.pa.gov). Use this shortcut to get right to the CWD pages <http://bit.ly/PGC-CWD>.

Northwest Region

Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango & Warren counties
Franklin, PA 16323
(814) 432-3187 or (814) 432-3188,
(814)432-3189

Southwest Region

Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington & Westmoreland counties
Bolivar, PA 15923-2420
(724) 238-9523 or (724) 238-9524,
(724) 238-5639

Northcentral Region

Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, Tioga & Union counties
Jersey Shore, PA 17740-5038
(570) 398-4744 or (570) 398-4745,
(570) 398-3423
pgc-ncregion@pa.gov

Southcentral Region

Adams, Bedford, Blair, Cumberland, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Mifflin, Perry, Snyder & York counties
Huntingdon, PA 16652
(814) 643-1831 or (814) 643-9635

Northeast Region

Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Pike, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne & Wyoming counties
Dallas, PA 18612
(570) 675-1143 or (570) 675-1144

Southeast Region

Berks, Bucks, Chester, Dauphin, Delaware, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia & Schuylkill counties
Reading, PA 19605-9524
(610) 926-3136 or (610) 926-3137,
(610) 926-1966



What can you do as a **DEER PROCESSOR** to prevent the spread of **CWD**?

Determine if the cervid carcass presented to you is from a CWD-positive state or area, including Pennsylvania DMAs.

1. If the cervid carcass **IS NOT** from a CWD-positive state or area:
 - a. Wear nitrile or rubber gloves when processing the carcass.
 - b. Bone-out the meat from the cervid to remove high-risk parts such as brain, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils, and lymph nodes.
 - c. Avoid cutting into or through the backbone, either lengthwise or across the spine.
 - d. Dispose of butcher waste through the trash, or in food waste dumpsters intended for regulated landfills.
 - e. Thoroughly clean hands and processing tools with soap and hot water; spray all surfaces with 40% bleach (2 parts household bleach + 3 parts water) and allow to air dry; soak all knives and tools in 40% bleach for a minimum of five minutes. After removing knives and tools from bleach soak, allow to air dry. Once dry, all surfaces, knives, and tools can be rinsed with fresh water.
 - f. Do not allow animals to have access to processing area or processing waste.

2. If the cervid carcass **IS** from a CWD-positive state/province **OR** a DMA from which you are not within nor a cooperator for:
 - a. Process carcasses individually without mixing meat products between animals.
 - b. If high-risk parts are present, contact the appropriate Game Commission region office for disposal procedures.
 - c. If no high-risk parts are present, proceed according to the recommendations in item 1a. and 1b. above.
 - d. Thoroughly clean hands and processing tools with soap and water; then sanitize tools in a solution of 50 percent household chlorine bleach and 50 percent water for one hour.
 - e. CWD-positive meat or waste should not be rendered, burned in burn barrels, deposited in bone piles, or spread in areas where it can come in contact with other animals. High-risk parts can be disposed of in a landfill. Contact the appropriate Game Commission region office with questions.
 - f. Do not allow animals to have access to processing areas or processing waste.

3. If the specimen has **evidence of being tagged** – actual ear tags, torn ears, or holes in the ears – **AND** was not harvested within a high fence/shooting facility, this may indicate an escape from a captive cervid facility and the appropriate Game Commission region office should be contacted.