CWD

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?
CWD is a threat to deer and elk in Pennsylvania and the PA Game Commission was created to protect wildlife resources. Activities designed to reduce the risks associated with this disease are ongoing. Surveillance for CWD began in Pennsylvania in 1998 and will continue in order to understand the prevalence and distribution of the disease.

- Do not feed deer or elk - Supplemental feeding concentrates wildlife and facilitates the spread of disease.
- Report visibly sick deer to your regional office; or if you are hunting and have the opportunity and license to harvest the animal, please do so.
- Continue to hunt and submit your harvest for free testing - reducing deer numbers is currently the best way to slow the spread of CWD.

Research conducted on CWD has demonstrated that it can pass through the digestive tract of scavengers and predators and remain infectious; plants can uptake CWD prions and remain infectious; soil retains CWD prions for years; and water sources can be contaminated with CWD prions. And when compared with other prion disease agents, CWD prions are more adaptable to other species in laboratory settings. Much is still unknown about CWD and limiting exposure of all species is essential.

The PA Game Commission manages wildlife in cooperation with the public. Managing CWD in Pennsylvania is going to require a long-term commitment from the Game Commission and its wildlife partners, including hunters and wildlife watchers.

What can be done about CWD?

How can I tell if an animal has CWD?
CWD-infected animals may not show clinical signs of the disease for up to 18 to 24 months post-infection. During this period, animals look and act normal but are infectious and spreading the disease. Clinical signs of the disease include lowered head, lowered ears, progressive weight loss, rough hair coat, excessive salivation, excessive thirst, excessive urination, and other behavioral changes including loss of 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. Confirming an animal is infected with CWD requires laboratory testing.

How is it spread?
CWD transmission can occur through direct animal-to-animal contact as well as indirectly through prion-contaminated environments. CWD-infected individuals shed prions through saliva, urine, and feces; and infected carcasses contribute to environmental contamination. Once in the environment, CWD prions may remain infectious in the soil for anywhere from several years to decades.

How can I tell if an animal has CWD?

CWD is an incurable, untreatable, always fatal brain disease caused by a misshapen protein known as a prion. It affects members of the cervid (deer) family and was first recognized in mule deer at a Colorado research facility in 1967. CWD is classified as a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) and is similar to other TSEs like scrapie in sheep, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, also known as mad cow disease) in cattle, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans.

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**What precautions should I take?**

Hunters should wear gloves while field dressing. Thoroughly clean hands and processing tools with soap and hot water; spray all surfaces with 4% bleach (2 parts household bleach + 3 parts water) and allow to air dry then rinse with fresh water.

If you encounter a visibly sick deer while hunting and have the opportunity and license to harvest it, please do so. Then contact the Game Commission region office to surrender the deer for testing and receive a replacement harvest tag.

**Where can I have my animal tested?**

Deer taken within DMAs and EAs can be submitted for free testing at locations listed under “Head Bins & Dumpsters” tab found at: www.arcg.is/1G4TLr

Hunters can submit their harvested deer to the Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System for testing; for a fee. The Chronic Wasting Disease Submission Form for hunters can be found at www.padls.org.

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**CERVID PARTS MOVEMENT BAN**

To help prevent CWD from being spread within the state, the Pennsylvania Game Commission has banned the importation of high-risk carcass parts from any state or Canadian province. Export of these parts from any Disease Management Areas or Established Areas within Pennsylvania is also prohibited.

**Permitted Parts**

The following cervid parts may be safely transported into and within Pennsylvania. These parts may be moved out of Pennsylvania’s Disease Management Areas and Established Area.

- 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
- Finished taxidermy mounts

**Where has CWD been found?**

Pennsylvania detected its first case of CWD in 2012 in Adams County. Currently, there are six active Disease Management Areas (DMAs).

- DMA 2 covers more than 8,300 square miles, and includes all or parts of Adams, Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Juniata, Mifflin, Perry, Northumberland, Snyder, Somerset, Union, Westmoreland, and York counties. DMA 3 covers more than 1,380 square miles in all or parts of Armstrong, Cambria, Clarion, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson and Indiana counties. DMA 4 covers more than 820 square miles in all or parts of Berks, Lebanon and Lancaster counties. DMA 5 covers more than 210 square miles in Warren County. DMA 6 covers more than 90 square miles in parts of Elk, Clearfield, and Jefferson counties. DMA 7 covers more than 460 square miles in parts of Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, and Sullivan counties.

**What if I’m hunting in an area where CWD is known to exist?**

Follow these guidelines to prevent the spread of the disease:

- Be familiar with the regulations for the transportation of harvested game where you are hunting as well as the Pennsylvania Cervid Parts Importation Ban
- Minimize the handling of and cutting through brain and spinal tissues.
- Process the animal near the area where it was harvested so high-risk parts can be disposed of properly. It is illegal to import high-risk parts into Pennsylvania or out of Disease Management Areas (DMAs) and Established Areas (EAs) within Pennsylvania.
- Ask your butcher to process your meat individually, without meat from other animals; or process your own meat.
- Only bring low-risk parts back to Pennsylvania or out of a DMA or EA.
- Have your animal tested and do not consume animals that test positive for CWD.

**Where can I learn more?**

- Pennsylvania Game Commission www.arcg.is/1G4TLr
- PA Department of Agriculture www.agriculture.pa.gov
- Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance www.cwd-info.org
- Centers for Disease Control www.cdc.gov
- World Health Organization www.who.int/en