

Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a rare neurological disease found in a small percentage of wild deer and elk in restricted areas of North America. The disease belongs to a family of diseases called *transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs)*. CWD attacks the brains of infected deer and elk, causing animals to become emaciated, display abnormal behavior, lose bodily functions and eventually die. Testing for CWD is done by sampling a specific portion of the brain, tonsils or lymph nodes from the heads of animals. There is no practical way to test live animals. There is no known cure for CWD.

Recent CWD confirmations in deer and elk from previously CWD “free” states and provinces prompted an increase in scientific investigation, media coverage and speculation about CWD in wild deer and elk populations.

Other Similar Diseases

Other TSEs include scrapie in domestic sheep and goats, “mad cow disease” in cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob (CJD) in humans. While CWD is similar to these diseases, there is no known relationship between CWD and any other TSEs of animals or people.

Is CWD in Montana’s Wild Deer and Elk Populations?

CWD has not been found in any wild animals in Montana. CWD, however, was diagnosed in captive elk on one alternative livestock facility (formerly known as game farms) in Montana in 1999. All elk in the quarantined facility were destroyed.

What is Montana doing to address the issue?

Montana’s efforts to address CWD began in 1996 when we established our first CWD-specific wild deer and elk surveys. The effort was prompted by reports of CWD in neighboring states and provinces and initiated to detect CWD as early as possible to give Montana the best chance possible to control or eliminate the disease should it be detected in Montana.

In 1998, increasing concerns led to the development of a cooperative effort between the Montana Department of Livestock and FWP to create new regulations and increase scientific surveillance of both wild and captive deer and elk in Montana.

To date, FWP has tested approximately 1,700 wild deer and elk taken by hunters from throughout the state, plus 50 deer and elk that appeared sick. All tested negative for CWD. Alternative Livestock producers have tested about 1,700 deer and elk from alternative livestock facilities. Similarly, none tested positive for CWD.

CWD testing of deer and elk taken by hunters will continue this fall, as will testing of any deer or elk over 16 months of age that die in an alternative livestock facility in Montana.

FWP is developing a CWD action plan to prepare for the possibility of CWD moving into Montana's wild deer and elk.

In addition, Montana continues to work with adjacent states, Canadian provinces and federal agencies to share resources and to cooperate in responding to wildlife diseases including CWD. A National CWD response program is under development.

Is CWD a human health hazard?

Public health officials at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control have studied CWD and have not found any link to neurological disease in humans. And, there is no evidence that CWD can be naturally transmitted to humans or to animals other than deer or elk. However, scientific studies are still in progress to determine the risk, if any, that CWD poses to human health.

Precautions

In the meantime, it's a good idea for people to avoid contact with any wild animal that appears sick, regardless of the cause of illness and to take some other simple precautions.

- Contact your nearest FWP office to report any animal that appears sick.
- Wear rubber or latex gloves when field dressing animals.
- Bone out the meat.
- Avoid handling brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands, knives and saws thoroughly after field dressing.

Nonresident hunters

Nonresident hunters should check with their respective wildlife agency concerning regulations specific to importation of harvested game animals.

For more information

For more information, visit:

- www.cwd-info.org.
- fwp.state.mt.us, click on *Hunting*, then click on *Know Before You Go*.
- Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, (406) 444-0273
- www.liv.state.mt.us