



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Provided by the Nevada Division of Wildlife and Nevada Department of Agriculture

WHAT IS CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an untreatable, fatal neurological (brain and nervous system) disease found in deer and elk in certain geographical locations in North America. The disease belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) or prion diseases. The disease attacks the brain and neural tissue of infected deer and elk. While CWD is similar to mad-cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, there is no causal link between CWD and any other TSE of animals or people. It is not known exactly how CWD is spread. It is believed that the agent responsible for the disease may be spread both directly (animal to animal contact) and indirectly (soil or other surface to animal). It appears that the disease may be transmitted from an infected animal via saliva, feces, and urine.

There have been no cases of Chronic Wasting Disease in Nevada.

very emaciated (thus “wasting” disease) and appear in very poor body condition. Infected animals also often stand near water and consume large amounts of water. Drooling or excessive salivation may be apparent.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SEE A DEER THAT SHOWS CWD SIGNS?

There have been no CWD cases in Nevada, but hunters should be vigilant when afield for deer or elk that display abnormal behavior. Accurately document the location of the animal and immediately contact the nearest office of the Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW), or call the

Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDOA) at (775) 688-1180, extension 261. Do not attempt to touch, disturb, kill, or remove the animal.

WHAT IS NEVADA DOING TO PREVENT CWD?

While Chronic Wasting Disease has not been found in Nevada, the Nevada Division of Wildlife and the Nevada Department of Agriculture are taking proactive steps to prevent CWD in Nevada. For instance, as part of an ongoing monitoring program, voluntary check stations to collect deer and elk samples are being set up during hunting season to gather up to 500 elk and 200 deer samples. Biologists, wardens and Department of Agriculture personnel are visiting meat lockers and game processing plants to request brain samples. The Nevada Department of Agriculture has restricted importation of live deer and elk into the state. And a widespread public awareness campaign has been implemented to educate sportsmen, meat proces-

Boning out meat is recommended. Wear latex gloves, minimize handling of brain and spinal tissues, wash hands and instruments thoroughly.

sors, taxidermists, guides and local and federal agencies.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO COMBAT CWD IN OTHER STATES?

National and individual state efforts to address CWD are accelerating rapidly. In other states with captive animals known to have been exposed to CWD, management is concentrating on quarantining or depopulating captive or free-ranging animals in the affected area. In some cases around captive populations, double fencing is recommended to prevent direct contact between captive and wild animals. In wild populations, the management option recommended is to reduce the density of

animals in the infected area by selective culling of animals suspected to have been directly exposed to the disease. In Colorado and Wisconsin, large numbers of animals are being killed to reduce density of animals and thus slow the transmission of the disease. There is still a large need for research on the disease as many questions go unanswered. There is also a need for increased funding to support additional laboratories for testing animals for

the disease. Almost every state wildlife agency is now planning an increased effort at surveillance to detect if CWD is present. Many state agencies have banned the importation of cervids into the state. Some states have also halted intrastate movement of deer and elk and banned supplemental feeding programs. Some states will not allow the heads of harvested animals to leave affected regions.

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CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

IS CWD DANGEROUS TO HUMANS?

Epidemiologists with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and epidemiologists at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment have studied Chronic Wasting Disease and found no evidence that CWD poses a risk to humans or domestic animals. (Over 16 years of monitoring in the infected area in Colorado has found no CWD in people or cattle living there.) Research completed to date indicates that the prions accumulate only in certain parts of infected animals – the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils, and spleen. Based on these findings, hunters are recommended to bone out their meat and consume only muscle tissue from harvested animals. The World Health Organization (WHO) has likewise said there is no scientific evidence CWD can infect humans. However, as a precaution the WHO also says no part of a deer or elk with evidence of CWD should be consumed by people or other animals.

Hunters should look for deer or elk that display abnormal behavior such as staggering or poor balance.

CAN I HAVE DEER VENISON TESTED?

Deer “venison” cannot be tested—only brainstem tissue can be tested to detect the presence of CWD. There is no means of testing deer tissue samples for CWD in Nevada at present. However, the Nevada Division of Wildlife in cooperation with the Nevada Department of Agriculture has been conducting an ongoing survey of hunter harvested deer and elk since 1998. To date no evidence of CWD has been found in Nevada’s free ranging deer and elk populations.

For more information, contact
Nevada Division of Wildlife, (775) 688-1500
Nevada Department of Agriculture,
(775) 688-1180 extension 261



Nevada Department
of Agriculture



WHAT IS THE PROPER DISPOSAL METHOD OF DEER AND ELK ESPECIALLY IF I TRAVEL TO ENDEMIC STATES?

Be especially careful if you are handling an animal from a known infection area to avoid the possible introduction of CWD in Nevada. If you handle an infected or obviously diseased carcass, please contact the State Veterinarian at (775) 688-1180 extension 261, before disposing at a sanitary landfill.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS SHOULD HUNTERS TAKE?

Health officials advise hunters not to consume meat from animals known to be infected with the disease. Boning out meat is recommended. In addition, they suggest hunters take simple precautions such as wearing latex gloves when field dressing carcasses, minimize handling of brain and spinal tissues, and washing hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed. Request that your animal is processed individually, without meat from other animals being added to meat from your animal. Hunters should also support states’ efforts to restrict deer or elk importation; support state regulations to restrict movement of harvested animals out of affected areas, and report any suspected violations. Finally, hunters should arm themselves with information, especially practical tips for hunting and field dressing game.



A disease that affects wild deer and elk herds

