



Chronic Wasting Disease

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What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a contagious, fatal neurological disease affecting wild and farmed cervids such as deer, moose, elk, caribou, and reindeer.

CWD belongs to a family of diseases called prion diseases or transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Other TSEs include bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, scrapie in sheep and goats, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and other human prion diseases in people, including variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (known as “mad cow disease”).

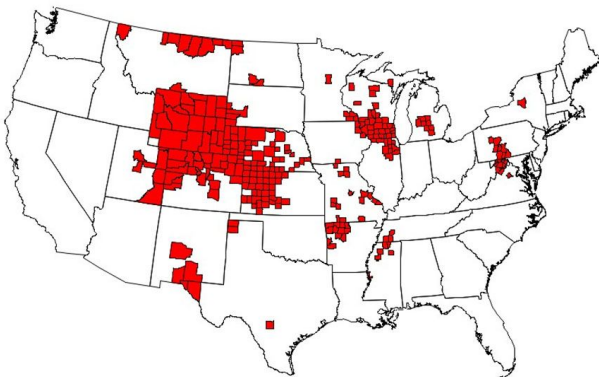
Where does CWD come from?

The disease is caused by prions, infectious protein material that, when folded incorrectly, becomes infectious and deadly. Prions persist for long periods of time in the environment and they are shed through an infected animal's saliva, blood, feces, urine, and antler velvet. The carcass of an animal that dies from CWD can become a source for new infections.

Where is CWD found?

As of September 2019, CWD in free-ranging deer, elk and/or moose has been reported in at least 26 states in the United States, as well as two provinces in Canada.

In addition, CWD has been reported in reindeer and/or moose in Norway, Finland, and Sweden, and a small number of imported cases have been reported in South Korea. The disease has also been found in farmed deer and elk across the United States.



CWD among free-ranging cervids by county, June 2019.
Image courtesy of Centers for Disease Control

What are the symptoms of CWD?

It may take over a year before an infected animal develops symptoms, which can include drastic weight loss (wasting), stumbling, listlessness and other neurologic symptoms. Specifically, animals become thin, drink and urinate excessively, have poor balance & coordination, lack body fat, have drooping ears, and difficulty swallowing. Inability to swallow leads to aspiration pneumonia and death.

Is there a treatment for CWD?

There is no vaccine or treatment. CWD is always fatal.

Can CWD be transmitted to humans?

Currently, there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk for humans; however, public health officials at the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommend that people do not consume meat from animals known to be infected. More information is available from the CDC: cdc.gov/prions/cwd.

What precautions should be taken when eating cervid meat?

- Consider having your deer processed and wrapped individually, either privately or commercially.
- Consider having your deer tested, even if it's not mandatory in your county.
- The prions that cause CWD are very resistant to heat and freezing temperatures. Cooking or freezing the meat will not remove prions from any infected meat.

What is being done to stop the spread of CWD?

Experts from the University of Minnesota are currently working on developing faster diagnostic tests, researching the epidemiology of CWD, and analyzing the ecological impacts of the disease. Stay up-to-date with new developments at z.umn.edu/CWDWatch.

What should I do if I see a sick deer in MN?

Please immediately report any sick deer to your local conservation officer (dnr.state.mn.us/officerpatrolareas) or area wildlife office (dnr.state.mn.us/areas/wildlife).

Additional Information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/prions/cwd
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: dnr.state.mn.us/cwd