



Chronic Wasting Disease in White-Tailed Deer

What is it?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a neurological disease found in deer, elk, and moose. It belongs to a group of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) or prion diseases. CWD is always fatal, and is spread through direct (animal to animal contact) and indirect (soil to animal) means. It is thought that the most common mode of transmission is through saliva or urine. Though CWD is similar to mad cow disease in cattle and scrapie in sheep, there is no known relationship between CWD and other TSE's found in humans. There is currently no evidence that CWD is transmissible to humans, though it is not recommended to consume meat from a deer that is known CWD positive. To date, CWD has not been found in Indiana.



What can hunters do?

If you see a deer exhibiting symptoms similar to CWD, note the location and contact your local wildlife biologist immediately. If you hunt outside of Indiana where CWD is known to be found, you must only bring in de-boned meat, cleaned skulls, hides, or finished taxidermy mounts, or you can take your carcass to a state or federally inspected meat processor within 72 hours of entry into the state.

How does it affect deer?

Infected animals may not show signs of CWD until in the late stages of the disease. Deer showing symptoms of CWD appear emaciated, exhibit abnormal behavior such as staggering or standing with poor posture, salivate excessively, or carry their head and ears lower than normal. Though impacts of CWD on herd dynamics is currently unknown, modeled CWD epidemics failed to achieve equilibrium in infected deer populations, indicating that CWD may lead to local extinctions of infected deer populations if left unmanaged.

What is the DNR doing?

The Indiana DNR has had a surveillance program in place since 2002. In addition to responding to calls regarding deer exhibiting symptoms of CWD, biologists are collecting samples from hunter harvested deer and road-kills. The DNR has also partnered with the Board of Animal Health to minimize the risk of CWD entering Indiana's border.

