

Questions & Answers on Chronic Wasting Disease



What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

CWD is a neurological (brain and nervous system) disease found in deer, elk, moose, caribou and reindeer (collectively referred to as cervids). The disease is a type of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE), or prion disease. Other well known TSE's include scrapie in sheep, mad cow disease in cattle, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. CWD attacks the brains of infected cervids and is always fatal.

How is it spread?

CWD is spread both directly (animal to animal contact) and indirectly (soil or other surface to animal). The most common modes of transmission are via an infected animal's saliva, feces, or decomposing carcass.

Is it dangerous to Humans?

To date, there is no evidence that humans can contract CWD. However, recent studies have shown that monkeys can contract CWD by consuming meat and neurological tissues of infected animals. These studies raise concerns that there may also be a risk to people. Public health officials do not recommend consuming meat products from CWD positive animals.

What is a prion?

Prions are infectious, abnormally shaped proteins that accumulate in neurological tissue (i.e. brain, spinal cord, lymph nodes, etc.) and cause progressive degeneration. They cannot be destroyed by radiation or temperatures under 1000°F (so they are not destroyed by cooking). Prions can bind to certain common soil types and stay infectious in the environment for decades.

What precautions should hunters take?

Hunters should avoid shooting, handling and consuming any animal that is acting abnormally or appears to be sick. Always take normal precautions when field dressing a carcass (i.e. wearing gloves and protective clothing, washing hands, etc.). A complete list of current hunter recommendations is available at:

www.azgfd.com/Wildlife/Diseases/



Where has it been found?

To date, CWD has been detected in both captive and free ranging cervids in 24 US states, two Canadian provinces, and in the southern region of Norway. As of October 1st, 2017, Arizona is a CWD-free state.

How can you tell if a cervid has CWD?

Most animals do not show obvious signs of CWD until late in the course of the disease. Animals with CWD can be infectious for several years without showing symptoms. When signs emerge, animals begin to display abnormal behavior such as staggering or standing with their head and ears drooped. Infected animals can be very thin (thus, wasting disease) and often drool excessively. These symptoms occur with other diseases of wildlife and are not exclusively linked to CWD.

What should I do if I see a deer or elk that shows signs of CWD?

Accurately document the location of the animal and report it to Arizona Game and Fish Department officials immediately. Do not attempt to disturb, kill or remove the animal.

Can I have my deer or elk tested?

YES! If you would like to have your harvested deer or elk tested for CWD, bring the head of your animal to any Game and Fish Department office between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday (office addresses can be found online). Department personnel will collect a tissue sample for testing. **Heads must be kept cool up until the samples are taken.** You will be asked to provide information about your harvested animal (hunt number, permit number, game management unit, and date of harvest) and where/how you can be reached (phone number) in case the test is positive.

In addition to sampling at Department offices, the Arizona Game and Fish Department also partners with several local meat processors and taxidermists. If you plan to have your harvest professionally processed or mounted, contact your local business to find out if they sample for CWD. **CWD test results can be found here:**

<http://azgfdeservices.com/cwdlogin.aspx>

What is being done to combat CWD?

Extensive surveillance programs that monitor CWD distribution and prevalence have been instituted nationwide. In captive populations, facilities that test positive or are exposed to CWD undergo mandatory quarantine during an investigative period. Double fencing around captive populations are highly recommended to prevent direct contact between captive and wild animals. In states where wild cervids have tested positive for CWD, wildlife agencies are employing several different management actions to contain and control the disease. The overall strategy has been to reduce the density of wild cervids in infected populations in order to minimize disease transmission. Nearly all state wildlife agencies have increased surveillance efforts to detect CWD. However, no one method has been identified as being the most successful at eradicating the disease. Research is ongoing to determine the most effective measures to contain and control CWD in wild populations.

To date, Arizona is a CWD-free state. Our annual risk-based surveillance program has tested over 21,000 samples since 1998. The Arizona Game and Fish Department has partnered with local meat processor and taxidermists in an effort to sample as many hunter-harvested animals as possible. Additional animals that appear sick are targeted and tested year-round. Hunters are advised to avoid shooting, handling or consuming any animal that is acting abnormally or appears to be sick. Contact the Wildlife Disease Hotline at 877-972-8426 if you see or harvest an animal that appears sick. ALWAYS take normal precautions when dressing wild game.

Despite Arizona's clean record, the Department is concerned that

What can hunters do?

Hunters can assist wildlife agencies in the management of CWD by following the rules and recommendations outlined on this flyer. Hunters should relay their concerns about CWD to political leaders and encourage support for adequate and sustained funding of the National CWD Plan and for increased assistance to state wildlife agricultural agencies to research, monitor and manage CWD.

Whom should I contact to find out more?

Contact AZGFD Wildlife Health Program personnel at the numbers below for more information and updates on the status of CWD in Arizona. The Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance web site at www.cwd-info.org is a clearing house for CWD news, information, regulations and resources. Check the site frequently for updates or email questions regarding CWD issues.

Concerns over CWD should not stop you from enjoying this hunting season. Chronic Wasting Disease has never been detected in Arizona. The Arizona Game and Fish Department will continue to monitor for CWD and will notify the public if it is found within the state.

CWD might be inadvertently brought into the state through the transport of infected animal tissues.

State law prohibits the transport of cervid brains, intact skulls, or spinal columns into Arizona. The following deer or elk parts harvested out-of-state are OK to bring back into Arizona: boneless meat, clean hides (no skull or soft tissue attached), antlers, clean skull plates, finished taxidermy mounts/products, upper canine teeth with no meat or tissue attached. The use of deer or elk urine-based attractants is prohibited. These restrictions are in an effort to protect Arizona's deer and elk herds from CWD by reducing the risk of direct (animal-animal) and indirect (environmental contamination) transmission of the disease.

A national chronic wasting disease plan was developed and delivered to Congress in 2002. The plan outlines a coordinated approach for states and federal agencies to develop research, surveillance and management strategies for CWD as well as communication plans for disseminating information on a regional or national scale.

The plan can be viewed at www.cwd-info.org.

This information was accurate as of September 2017.

For more information on CWD visit:
www.azgfd.com/Wildlife/Diseases/