



Chronic Wasting Disease in Montana

Frequently Asked Questions

New in 2020

- Carcass Disposal Requirements: In 2020 there are no transport restrictions within the state. A carcass may be moved anywhere in the state regardless of where it was harvested as long as the carcass parts are disposed of in a landfill after butchering / processing. Carcass parts, such as brain, eyes, spleen, lymph glands, and spinal cord material, should be bagged and disposed of in a landfill or may be left at the kill site. Dumping carcasses is illegal, unethical and can spread diseases, including chronic wasting disease. This new requirement applies to all deer, elk, and moose carcasses wherever in the state they are harvested by hunters or as vehicle-killed salvage. [Protect our herds: properly dispose of carcasses.](#)
- All scents and lures that use cervid-derived glandular scents are prohibited in Montana. This change is intended to prevent the spread of CWD.
- Sample submission is voluntary throughout Montana. If hunters want their harvested animal sampled, they can submit samples themselves by following steps on the Montana CWD Submission Guide or by visiting a CWD Sampling Station (see below or online at fwp.mt.gov/cwd).
- Certain areas of the state are designated as Priority Surveillance Areas where FWP is making a concerted effort to gather more samples. In those specific areas, hunters are asked to voluntarily submit a sample from their animal. For instructions on how or where to submit a sample, see below guide or visit fwp.mt.gov/cwd.
- Report sick-looking deer, elk or moose. If you shoot an animal that looks diseased or sick, report it immediately to your local FWP office and avoid handling it.

General Overview

What is chronic wasting disease (CWD)?

CWD is a 100% fatal disease that infects members of the deer family, including elk, moose, mule and white-tailed deer. CWD is not a virus, bacteria, or fungus. It is caused by infectious, mis-folded proteins, called prions, that spread throughout the animal and result in organ damage and eventual

death. These prions are found throughout bodily tissues and secretions and are shed into the environment before and after death. When other animals come in contact with the prions, either from infected animals or from contaminated environments, they can be infected. CWD does not appear to naturally infect cattle or other domesticated animals. The disease is slow acting, degenerative, and always fatal. The name comes from the appearance of symptomatic animals, which get very skinny and sick-looking before they die. There is no vaccine or cure for CWD.

Can humans be infected by CWD?

There is no known transmission of CWD to humans. However, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that hunters harvesting a deer, elk, or moose from an area where CWD is known to be present have their animal tested for CWD prior to consuming the meat, and to not consume the meat if the animal tests positive.

Some simple precautions should be taken when field dressing harvested animals:

- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed. Instruments should be washed in a 40% bleach solution for 5 minutes.
- Avoid processing and consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals. (Normal field dressing coupled with boning out a carcass will essentially remove these parts.)

Where does CWD come from?

The origin of CWD is unknown. It was discovered in 1967 in mule deer at a research facility in Colorado. Shortly thereafter it was also found in captive mule deer and elk in Ontario, Colorado and Wyoming. By the 1990s, it was discovered in wild white-tailed and mule deer, elk and moose in Colorado and Wyoming and among captive animals in Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Montana and Oklahoma. As of 2018, it has been found in captive or free-ranging herds in 26 states, three Canadian provinces, Norway, Finland and South Korea.

How did CWD get to Montana?

CWD was found among wild deer in Montana in 2017. CWD infections along our northern and southern borders are likely the result of the natural spread of the disease from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Wyoming to Montana. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Wyoming have documented CWD-positive deer close to Montana's border. CWD is also found in neighboring North and South Dakota.

Can CWD be eradicated?

After decades of CWD management across the country, most agencies and researchers agree that CWD cannot be eradicated once it infects a herd. Other states have attempted eradication and set up unreasonable expectations with hunters and the public. Eradication is not the goal of FWP.

How does CWD spread?

Scientists believe CWD prions likely spread between animals through body fluids like feces, saliva, blood, or urine, either through direct contact or indirectly through environmental contamination of soil, food or water. Once introduced into an area, the CWD protein is contagious within deer and elk populations and can spread quickly. Experts believe CWD prions can remain in the environment for a long time, so other animals can contract CWD from the environment even after an infected deer or elk has died. Feeding wildlife such as deer is illegal and can congregate animals and lead to the rapid spread of disease.

Management

How could CWD impact Montana's deer and elk herds?

If CWD infects enough animals, it could reduce the herd in the long term. Other states have seen deer populations decline when CWD infects 20 to 40 percent of a herd. In Wyoming, heavily infected herds of mule deer declined 21 percent per year and whitetails declined by 10 percent. Colorado saw a 45 percent decline in infected mule deer herds over 20 years.

Because the distribution and intensity of CWD infections are variable across a broad landscape, the impacts across the landscape will also be variable. Keeping deer numbers down and dispersed, and reducing buck:doe ratios, may keep the prevalence low and manageable. Fish, Wildlife & Parks' focus will be on managing CWD-infected areas for prevalence at 5 percent or lower and preventing spread. This may also mean keeping deer or elk numbers low to keep infection rates low.

Where has CWD been found in Montana?

CWD was first found in the wild in October 2017. To date, CWD has been detected in Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Daniels, Gallatin, Hill, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, McCone, Phillips, Powder River, Prairie, Rosebud, Sheridan, Treasure, Valley, Yellowstone counties.

To view a map of where CWD has been found in Montana, click visit fwp.mt.gov/cwd.

What is Montana doing to manage CWD?

In 2020, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will continue chronic wasting disease surveillance in high-priority areas known as Priority Surveillance Areas in northwest, southwest and eastern Montana.

Hunters who harvest a deer, elk or moose in these areas are asked to voluntarily submit their animal for sampling to help gather additional data for that area. This information will be used to help inform the best management strategies for the affected hunting districts.

FWP is asking hunters to properly dispose of their carcass waste in a landfill to help prevent the spread of the disease. FWP has also begun to liberalize harvest (by either increasing total tags or either sex/antlered tags) in certain CWD positive hunting districts, with the goal of reducing herd densities and mule deer buck densities. Mule deer bucks are more likely to be CWD positive than does. FWP is currently working on a CWD and urban deer management plan for the town of Libby.

What can I do to help with CWD?

Hunting is the primary tool for monitoring and managing the spread of CWD. Concerns over CWD shouldn't stop you from enjoying hunting season. Hunters are critical to conservation efforts across the state and protecting our wildlife heritage.

Proper carcass disposal is critical to protecting our herds. All carcass parts, such as brain, eyes, spleen, lymph glands, and spinal cord material, should be bagged and disposed of in a landfill or may be left at the kill site. Dumping carcasses is illegal, unethical and can spread diseases, including chronic wasting disease. This new requirement applies to all deer, elk, and moose carcasses wherever in the state they are harvested by hunters or as vehicle-killed salvage.

Can hunters take harvested animals out of Montana or bring them into Montana?

To guard against importing CWD from other states, Montana regulates the transportation of hunter-harvested deer, elk, and moose from CWD-infected states. It is illegal to bring into Montana the carcass of any deer, elk, or moose from the states and Canadian provinces where CWD has been detected.

As of 2019, those states and provinces were Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Quebec, and Saskatchewan.

What hunters are allowed to bring home:

- meat that is boned, cut and wrapped; quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached;
- hides with no heads attached;
- clean (no meat or tissue attached) skull plates with antlers attached;
- antlers with no meat or tissue attached;
- upper canine teeth, also known as "buglers", "whistlers" or "ivories;"
- finished head, partial body or whole body mounts already prepared by a taxidermist; or

- tested and certified disease-free animals.

What requirements are in place for meat processors and taxidermists?

Hunters should consult with meat processors or taxidermists for any specific requirements they may have. Please read the recommendations below if you intend to donate your deer, elk or moose to a food bank.

What requirements are in place for donating harvested meat to a food bank?

If you intend to donate your deer, elk, or moose to a food bank, we strongly recommend that it be sampled for CWD testing beforehand. FWP will provide opportunities for sampling and testing at designated CWD-sampling check stations, regional headquarter offices, or through online instructions for mailing samples to the Wildlife Health Lab.

Beginning in 2020, when hunters come to have their animal sampled for CWD, FWP staff will ask hunters whether they intend to donate their animal to a foodbank. This information will allow us to track the test status of donated animals, which can be emailed in a weekly report to Montana Food Bank Network staff.

Carcasses may be processed prior to having a test result in hand. However, the food bank network will verify that a batch of CWD-tested meat from a processor has a negative test result before it is placed on shelves for public consumption. Untested meat will be labeled as such.

Sampling

How do you test for CWD?

To determine whether an animal is infected, a certified CWD-testing diagnostic laboratory must test an animal's retropharyngeal lymph nodes or brainstem for evidence of CWD. These samples can only be collected from dead animals. Unfortunately, there are no non-invasive CWD tests for live animals, and meat cannot be tested for CWD.

How long will it take for me to find out if my deer has CWD?

If your animal is sampled by FWP staff at a check station or regional office during the general surveillance season or during a special hunt, results will be posted online (fwp.mt.gov/cwd) and emailed to the hunter within three weeks.

What happens if my harvested animal tests positive for CWD?

Hunters may request a replacement license if their animal tests CWD-positive, however, the hunter must surrender their entire animal, including the head. No replacement licenses for subsequent seasons will be issued.

How can a hunter submit their own sample?

Hunters in Montana can have their deer, elk, or moose tested for chronic wasting disease with the help of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. FWP is paying for the testing of samples. CWD sampling is voluntary. In Priority Surveillance Areas, sampling is strongly encouraged to help FWP gather additional data to inform management.

Hunters can either take the samples themselves, fill out the online hunter submission form and mail them to our Wildlife Health Lab in Bozeman, or they can bring the animal (or head) to an FWP regional office or CWD Sampling Station. Hunters who visit a regional office should be prepared to experience wait times during busy hours. Check with your regional office for optimal times, but in general regional offices will be able to take samples during normal business hours. Sampling locations and hours of operation will also be posted on our website (fwp.mt.gov/cwd).

How many days after harvest can I still have lymph nodes tested for CWD?

While sooner is better than later, lymph nodes last a long time. As long as they are not decomposed or liquified, they can still be tested. Try to keep them cool or frozen until you submit them for testing.

Montana CWD Submission Guide

To submit a sample via mail to the FWP Lab, take the following steps:

- 1. Collect the lymph nodes:**
Please download the printable [Lymph Node Extraction Instruction Sheet](#) and/or watch [this video](#) for a demonstration. Only the lymph nodes are necessary for testing deer and elk. Extraction can easily be performed with a field knife. If you have a moose, please visit one of the CWD sampling locations or a regional headquarters office for assistance with collecting the brainstem and lymph nodes.
- 2. Put the lymph nodes in sealed plastic bag:**
Ziplock bags or a similar brand work best. Double bag the sample and wrap it in a paper towel.
- 3. Fill out the digital Hunter Harvest Submission Form:**
Please fill out the online [Hunter Harvest Submission Form](#) and follow the associated directions for labeling your samples. Your samples must be bagged and labeled to be testable. You will receive several emails confirming your submission, including one that will assign a unique CWD number that will be used to track your test results. Results will be

emailed to hunters and will be available online within 3 weeks. Be sure to record the location of harvest as accurately as possible. **Samples without location information will not be tested.**

4. **Shipment:**

Place the bagged samples, a cold ice pack, and the bagged submission form(s) in a small box or shipping envelope and send via your choice of postal carrier. **Do not freeze water in a Ziplock bag to use as a cold pack. It will leak and carriers may not deliver a leaking package.** We recommend using a carrier that will deliver your samples within 24-48 hours to prevent the samples from rotting. Please try to ship your samples on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday of each week, and avoid shipping on holidays, to prevent the samples from sitting over the weekend.

5. **Send to:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
ATTN: Wildlife Health Lab (CWD)
1400 S. 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

6. There is no cost for the test.

To submit a sample at an FWP regional office or CWD Sampling Station, bring the following items when you submit your head for testing:

1. **Animal's head:** Leave 2 to 4 inches of the neck below the low jawbone and base of the skull to ensure lymph nodes are present and not inadvertently left with the carcass. Samples cannot be collected from frozen heads.
2. **Location of Harvest:** GPS coordinates (Lat/Long or Township/Range/Section) of where you harvested your animal.