

Chronic Wasting Disease – Information for Hunters



What is CWD?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an incurable, highly contagious and always fatal disease of the central nervous system that affects members of the deer (cervid) family – deer, elk, moose and caribou. The disease is caused by one or more strains of misfolded and self-propagating proteins, called prions. Once an animal is infected with CWD, prions begin to replicate, first in the immune system (lymph nodes and tonsils) and later, in the brain, spinal cord and other organs. Manitoba has been monitoring wild cervids for the disease since 1997 and announced its first confirmed case of CWD in November 2021.

CWD is one of the most significant challenges in North American wildlife management. If allowed to establish and spread, it could negatively impact the health of wild cervid populations. If CWD becomes established in Manitoba, eradication will become impossible and negative impacts on the health of wild deer populations are expected.



How is CWD spread?

CWD can be spread by infected animals (dead or alive) and persist in the environment for years. Before they appear sick, CWD-positive animals can shed prions present in saliva, feces and urine. CWD spreads from animal to animal, particularly in herds, but can also be spread through the movement of prions deposited into the environment (eg. soil, food sources and mineral licks) as well as after death through their remains (eg. disposal piles for guts). The natural movement of infected animals across the landscape as well as movement of infected carcasses and associated by-products contribute to the spread of CWD to new areas.



What are the symptoms of CWD?

CWD is a progressive disease, meaning that in early stages, infected animals typically appear normal, while also spreading the disease. As the disease progresses, animals tend to be less alert, and fearful, with a general unhealthy look and obvious weight loss. In late stages, infected animals become very thin and uncoordinated, with drooping ears and heads, are unaware of their surroundings and often experience excessive drooling, drinking and urination.

HUNTING, HANDLING AND PREPARING WILD MEAT

While there have been no cases of CWD in people, public health agencies recommend against eating meat from CWD-positive animals. Hunters can take the following precautions when handling, field dressing, storing and preparing wild meat that may be of concern:

When out hunting

Avoid contact with any wild animal that appears to be sick. Note the exact location and report it to a conservation officer as soon as possible. If you accidentally kill a deer or elk that is unhealthy and extremely thin, **DO NOT** field dress the animal. Attach your game tag and report it to a conservation officer as soon as possible.

When field dressing

- Wear disposable rubber or latex gloves.
- Use knives and utensils dedicated for field dressing.
- Remove all internal organs/hides near where the animal was killed.
- Minimize or avoid handling brain, eye, lymphatic or spinal cord tissue.
- Debone the carcass and avoid cutting through the spine.
- Cool meat as soon as possible to a temperature of 4°C or lower.
- Consider waiting to take deboned meat to a butcher until CWD test results are returned as negative.
- Follow carcass disposal and clean-up procedures outlined at the end of this brochure.

Get your wild meat tested

If harvesting meat from the Mandatory Surveillance Zone, have your animal tested by submitting a sample to the various Sample Drop-off depots across the province. It is recommended to wait for your CWD sample test results before consuming the meat.

When storing

Use plastic bags, double-bag and freeze meat until your CWD test results are obtained.



When preparing and cooking

Use the following common food handling techniques:

- Thaw and marinate meats in the refrigerator
- Never refreeze thawed meat
- Use a meat thermometer to ensure wild game is properly cooked
- As a general rule, cook wild game until any fluids run clear

SUBMITTING SAMPLES AS PART OF MANITOBA'S CWD SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

Hunter participation in disease monitoring programs is critical in the long-term management of CWD and in protecting deer, elk, moose, and caribou populations in Manitoba. By submitting biological samples for CWD testing, hunters contribute to effective long-term detection and surveillance of CWD. Sample results can then be used to inform long-term response strategies that may be necessary to effectively prevent further spread of the disease.

Where is the submission of CWD samples required?

Mandatory Surveillance Zone – By law, hunters are required to submit the head and upper neck of elk and deer taken in the Mandatory Surveillance Zone. This includes the areas of Game Hunting Areas (GHAs) 5, 6, 6A, 11, 12, 13, 13A, 18, 18A, 18B, 18C, 22, 23, 23A, 27, 28, 29, 29A, 30, 31, 31A, 32, 33, 35, and 35A.





GHAs 23 and 23A have additional sample submission requirements for the lungs and trachea (windpipe) of deer or elk harvested in these areas. These samples are required to test for both the presence of Bovine Tuberculosis and CWD.

Other areas – If hunters are concerned about the safety of meat harvested from others areas, samples can also be submitted for testing through the CWD surveillance program.

Where do I submit my biological sample for testing?

Hunters can drop off samples to be tested at the various Sample Drop-off Depots located throughout the province. These locations can be found on the provincial website at www.manitoba.ca/cwd.

What is required for CWD testing?

When hunting in areas where sample submission is required:

- Parts required for CWD testing include the head and upper neck (2 – 4 inches) of the harvested animal.
- Samples must be submitted within 48 hours of harvesting to a Sample Drop-off Depot.
- Be prepared to provide all information required to fill out the Wildlife Sample Receipt Form. This includes:
 - o date of kill
 - o exact location of the kill (GPS coordinates or a legal land parcel location)
 - o sex of the animal, and
 - o your contact information.

- Use the poly bags provided at depots
- Keep your wildlife sample receipt, which contains your Sample Number, as this will allow you to confirm testing results.
- Antlers and heads will not be returned once submitted for testing.
- Hunters wanting to retain antlers will be responsible for cutting their own antlers off or employing a taxidermist to do so.
- Hunters wanting to retain entire heads for taxidermy mounts can do so by employing a taxidermist listed as a Sample Drop-off Depot, approved to collect samples for CWD testing on behalf of the department.

What happens to my sample once it is dropped off at a Sample Drop-Off Depot?

- Wildlife Health Program staff transport samples from the Sample Drop-off Depots to the nearest wildlife lab for processing.
- The retropharyngeal lymph nodes (RPLN), an incisor, and in certain cases the obex (brainstem) are removed.
- Tissue samples are then packaged and shipped out of province for CWD testing to accredited labs and results are reported back to the Wildlife Health Program as they become available.

How do I confirm my sample test results?

Sample results (both positive and negative) will be posted by sample number only to the Manitoba government website as they become available. The turn around time for getting your results back will depend on the volume of samples coming in but it generally takes between 6-12 weeks for sample results to come back.

To find your sample results:

- Go to: www.manitoba.ca/cwd
- Click on “CWD Sample Test Results” on the right-hand sidebar.
- Enter the Sample Number on the top-left corner of your Wildlife Sample Receipt Form in to the search bar and click “Search.”
- Results for your sample will display next to your Sample Number.
- If the sample number is not listed, it is likely still being processed.

List of possible results:

Negative for CWD – CWD prions were not detected in the submitted sample.

Pending – Sample received and is undergoing testing. Check back at a later date for results.

Untestable – Wrong tissue type submitted or sample was missing, decomposed, or damaged.

Contact Wildlife Health Program – Sample not tested, more information required. Contact the Wildlife Health Program at **cwd@gov.mb.ca** citing the sample number in the subject line.

If you have lost your sample number, or have questions about your CWD test results, please contact the Natural Resources and Northern Development Wildlife Lab in Dauphin at **1-204-638-4570** or by email at **cwd@gov.mb.ca**.

What happens if my sample tests positive for CWD?

If a sample tests positive for CWD, hunters will be immediately notified by phone and the department will provide options for meat to be properly disposed of.

RECOMMENDED DISPOSAL AND CLEAN-UP PROTOCOLS

Disposal of animal parts

Leave organs or hides near where the animal was killed to compost in a responsible manner (eg. away from open view, water bodies, and buildings), or otherwise dispose of responsibly.

Clean-up and equipment

- Thoroughly wash hands after field dressing or handling any wild meat with soap and warm water.
- Use an alcohol-based hand-cleanser if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Wash knives and other equipment with soap and water to remove organic material and rinse with water.
- Clean and soak tools in a 50/50 bleach-water solution for 1 hour for non-stainless steel items or 5 minutes for stainless steel items and rinse thoroughly.

For more information about CWD and Manitoba's response, visit **www.manitoba.ca/cwd**
email **cwd@gov.mb.ca** or call **1-800-214-6497**.

To report signs of illness in wildlife, sightings of cervids with ear tags, illegal feeding sites, and locations where cervids are congregating near hay bales or feedlots, contact a conservation officer in the local district office or call the TIP line at **1-800-782-0076**.