

Chronic Wasting Disease: Protocols for Harvesting and Testing Cervids in Manitoba

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an incurable, highly contagious and always fatal disease of the central nervous system that affects deer, elk, moose and caribou – members of the deer (cervid) family. CWD is one of the most significant challenges in North American wildlife management. Manitoba announced its first confirmed case of CWD in November 2021.

Manitoba's first priority is ensuring that people who make use of deer and other cervids as a food source are educated about CWD. This fact sheet provides information about precautions to take when handling, field dressing and preparing wild meat with CWD in mind, steps to take to get your animal tested for CWD to assist the province's CWD Management and Surveillance Program so that we can act swiftly to prevent disease spread and protect cervid populations throughout Manitoba for future generations.

Hunting, handling and preparing wild meat

While no cases of CWD have been found 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 fact sheet.

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.
- Wait for your CWD sample test results before consuming the meat.

When storing

- Using 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 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 some cases, the obex (brainstem) are removed.
- Tissue samples are then packaged and shipped out of province for CWD testing to various 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 will be posted by Sample Number only to the Government of Manitoba 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. The result is also posted on the CWD Sample Test Results web page.

How to retain antlers prior to CWD sample submission

Hunters wishing to retain antlers prior to sample submission can remove them as per the instructions below.



1. Wear rubber/latex gloves.
2. Cut the hide on the head in a V-shape on the front of the skull at an angle to a spot slightly above and behind the eyes. Make this cut on both sides of the skull. (Fig. 1)



3. Continue the v-shaped cut by cutting to the end of the first cut slightly above and behind the eyes. (Fig. 2)



4. Using a bone saw, follow the cuts in the hide to make a v-shaped wedge cut on both the front and back of the antlers. (Fig. 3)



5. Cut just behind and at the back of the eyes. Any deeper and the saw will cut too deep into the brain tissue. (Fig. 4)



6. Remove the antlers with attached skull plate. The brain tissue that will be removed with the bone plate should be scooped back into the cavity of the deer's skull. Use the tip of your knife, the brain tissue will easily fall out. (Fig. 5)

7. Retain the antlers, being sure to affix the appropriate tag (Head/Antler) to them.
8. Place the remaining head in a plastic bag. To meet provincial tagging requirements, ensure the antlers are kept with the head, until the head has been submitted for testing.
9. Complete and affix the Biological Sample Tag to the bag. This tag will be provided by the Sample Depot operator.

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 [cwg@gov.mb.ca](mailto: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.