

Chronic Wasting Disease (Fatal Deer Disease) Risk Management for Hunters

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Chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been found in the wild deer herd in Hampshire County, WV. CWD—a disease of the nervous system—is similar to mad cow disease in cattle, scrapie in sheep, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. There is no treatment for CWD, which results in distinctive lesions on the deer's brain. The disease is always fatal.

CWD is most likely spread by direct contact between deer. It may also come from soil contaminated with deer excrement. The high numbers of deer in West Virginia could cause the disease to spread rapidly in the state. Over the years, wildlife biologists have predicted that overpopulation of animals would lead to disease epidemics.

In Wisconsin, where CWD was found in 2002, experts expect a rapid spread of the disease because of high deer densities. Natural resources officials in Wisconsin authorized the killing of 25,000 deer in a 10-county area to reduce the herd density to 10 deer per square mile.

Scientific experiments have shown that CWD will not spread from deer to cattle even when they are penned together. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Wisconsin Medical Society state that CWD does not appear to be a human health issue, **but** they cannot state with absolute certainty that the disease poses no risk to humans. However, if proper precautions are taken, the risk—if any—to humans is low.

The Wisconsin Medical Society offers the following recommendations to hunters:



Use a disposable knife and saw—not your utility or hunting knife—to field dress and butcher a deer.



Use latex or impervious nonlatex gloves for field dressing and butchering.



Don't use household knives or ones used for other things to field dress or butcher a deer.



Use a disposable cover for your cutting board.



Don't saw across the spinal column to make steaks or roasts. Use only meat that's been cut from a bone with a knife.



Do not eat the eyes, brain, spinal cord, spleen, intestines, tonsils, or lymph nodes of any deer.



If a deer appears sick, **do not eat any of its meat**. Deer can appear to be healthy and vigorous for several years during CWD's long incubation period. Before death, the deer will show the clinical symptoms of weight loss, blank facial expression, nervousness, excessive salivation, increased drinking, frequent urination, and lowered head, and behavioral changes like isolation.