

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 in the cervid (deer) family, which includes deer, elk, moose and caribou. The disease is caused by one or more strains of self-propagating proteins, called prions. Infected animals can shed prions in saliva, feces, urine, and possibly, even after death, through their remains. The lymph nodes, tonsils, brain, spinal cord and internal organs of CWD-positive animals also contain these prions, which can be spread to other animals directly, or indirectly as they are deposited in the environment where they can persist for extended periods of time (e.g. possibly 5 years or more).

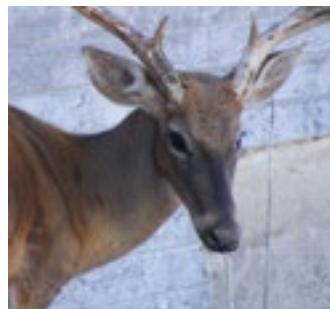
While there have been no cases of CWD in people, recent and on-going studies suggest that caution is warranted. Public health agencies including the World Health Organization, Health Canada, and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommend against eating meat from CWD-positive animals. These agencies also recommend against feeding meat or other parts of CWD-positive cervids to other animals.

Manitoba's first priority is ensuring that people who make use of deer and other cervids as a food source are educated about CWD and what precautions they can take to prevent this disease from spreading. This fact sheet provides information about safety considerations when handling, field dressing and preparing wild meat with CWD in mind, steps to take to get your animal tested for CWD, and how you can assist the province's CWD Management 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

Hunters can be assured that any wild game they harvest is safe to eat by following a few simple precautions.



When out hunting

- Avoid contact with any wild animal that appears to be sick.
- If you observe or accidentally kill a deer or elk that is unhealthy and extremely thin, do not field dress the animal. Note the exact location and report it to a conservation officer in the local district office.

When field dressing

- Wear disposable rubber or latex gloves.
- Use knives and utensils dedicated for field dressing.
- Remove all internal organs.
- Avoid handling and consuming brain, eye, lymphatic or spinal cord tissue.
- Leave organs or hides in the place of origin to compost in a responsible manner (eg. away from open view, water bodies, and buildings).
- Thoroughly wash hands and tools afterwards with soap and warm water.
- Use alcohol-based hand-cleanser if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cool meat as soon as possible to a temperature of 4°C or lower.

Get your wild meat tested

- If harvesting meat from the Mandatory or Voluntary Surveillance Zones, have your animal tested by submitting a sample to the various CWD 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 common food handling techniques:
 - o Thaw and marinate meats in the refrigerator
 - o Never refreeze thawed meat
 - o Use a meat thermometer to ensure wild game is properly cooked
 - o As a general rule, cook wild game until any fluids run clear

Submitting samples as part of Manitoba's CWD surveillance program

Since 1997, Manitoba has had proactive CWD prevention and surveillance program in place for wild cervids. This is particularly important because CWD is present in neighbouring jurisdictions. Surveillance methods for CWD include the collection and testing of wild cervids harvested in the province. There is no CWD test available for living animals, thus the province relies on testing samples from harvested animals.

The province has been divided into areas where CWD testing is required (Mandatory Surveillance Zone in high risk area), requested (Voluntary Surveillance Zone in moderate risk area) and available (low risk areas). CWD testing is provided by the province free of charge.

Where is sampling required, requested and available?

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 areas of Game Hunting Area (GHA) 22 west of PTH 83, as well as GHAs 5, 6, 6A, 11, 12, 13, 13A, 18 and 18B (west of PR 366), 18A, 18C, 23, 23A and 27.

(Note: It is also mandatory to submit head, upper neck, lungs and trachia from any elk or deer harvested in GHAs 23 & 23A for Bovine Tuberculosis testing.)

Voluntary Surveillance Zone - The department is interested in testing samples from hunter-harvested deer, elk and moose from along the southern Canada / USA border. Hunters who harvest an elk, moose or white-tailed deer taken within 20 km of the USA border in GHAs 28, 29, 29A, 31A, 31, 33, 35 or 35A, are requested to submit biological samples as part of the CWD Surveillance Program.

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.

What is required for CWD testing?

Parts required for CWD testing include the head and upper neck of the harvested animal. Hunters may retain their antlers attached to bone plate and cape.

When submitting your sample, you will be expected to provide the date of kill, exact location of the kill, sex of the animal and contact information. Please keep your wildlife sample receipt, which contains your Sample Number, as this will allow you to confirm testing results.

Samples should be submitted within 48 hours of harvesting. If unable to do so, call the Dauphin Wildlife Health Lab at 1-204-638-4570.

Where do I submit my biological sample for testing?

Hunters can drop off samples to be tested at the various CWD drop-off depots located throughout the province. CWD drop-off depot locations can be found on the provincial website at www.manitoba.ca/cwd.

How do I confirm my sample test results?

Sample test results for CWD will be posted online as they become available at www.manitoba.ca/cwd. To confirm the result of your test, compare your Sample Number located on the top-left corner of your wildlife sample receipt form to the Sample Test Results document posted online.

A sample reporting as "Negative for CWD" means that the meat harvested is safe for consumption. If a sample tests "Positive for CWD" hunters will be immediately notified by phone and results made public.

Some samples may be reported as "Untestable." This may be for a number of reasons:

- the wrong tissue type was submitted
- the sample was missing, decomposed or damaged.

Submission of samples within 48 hours of harvesting helps to ensure successful testing.

If the sample number is not listed, it is likely still being processed. If you have lost your Sample Number, or have questions about your CWD test results, please contact the Wildlife Health Lab in Dauphin at 1-204-638-4570.

How long will it take to get the results of CWD testing?

The amount of time required to get test results will depend on the volume of samples received by the lab, but it can take a few weeks.

The province will make every effort to expedite test results.

What is the protocol to dispose of meat that is from a CWD positive animal?

In the unlikely event that your sample tests positive for CWD, you will be immediately notified by phone and provincial staff will provide options for disposing of the meat properly. Do not feed meat or other parts of CWD-infected cervids to other animals.

How to retain antlers prior to submitting head for CWD sample testing

If the deer you've harvested has antlers that you wish to retain, remove them as per the instructions below.

1. Wear rubber 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. (Figure 1)



Figure 1

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



Figure 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. (Figure 3)



Figure 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. (Figure 4)



Figure 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. (Figure 5)



Figure 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 procedures

To dispose of animal parts

- Leave organs or hides in the place of origin to compost in a responsible manner (eg. away from open view, water bodies, and buildings), or otherwise dispose of responsibly.

To clean equipment

- Wash all knives and other equipment with soap and water to remove all organic material and rinse with water.
- Clean knives and other equipment by soaking them for an hour in a 50/50 solution of bleach and water for non-stainless steel items. For stainless steel items soak for a minimum of five minutes.
- Wipe down counters and other work areas with a 50/50 solution of bleach and water, and let them air-dry.

For more information about CWD in Manitoba visit www.manitoba.ca/cwd. Questions about CWD can also be emailed to cwd@manitoba.ca.

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.