

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Matthew T. Springer, University of Kentucky Department of Forestry and Natural Resources

What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

- Fatal brain disease for cervids (deer, elk, reindeer, moose, caribou)
- Prion disease (also called Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies) similar to mad cow (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) and Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease in humans
- Always fatal however animals can be infected for years before showing symptoms
- Infected animals can transmit the disease, even if they do not exhibit symptoms.
- The latest research indicates CWD is not trans-

missible to people or livestock however there is still a need to be cautious related to consuming and processing CWD positive animals

- CWD has been shown to lower survival and reproduction rates of infected individuals which means the population is negatively impacted



Juvenile white-tailed deer exhibiting symptoms of CWD.
 Photo courtesy: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

How Does CWD Spread?

- Spread by contact and sharing of fluids between individuals. Also there is some evidence that spread can occur less successfully via objects or environmental areas (soils, plants) contaminated with infectious materials (saliva, urine, carcasses of CWD-infected animals)
- Practices that concentrate individuals to very close areas are potential routes to spread CWD
- Can "jump" across the landscape (10-50 miles) due to natural dispersal movements made by juvenile infected deer
- Has made large "jumps", multiple states and/

or 1000's of miles, due to animals being moved within the captive cervid industry or other activities

- CWD is now present in half the states in the USA, two Canadian provinces, and multiple other countries since it was first found in 1967



Photo courtesy: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Where is it currently found?

- Currently CWD has not been detected in Kentucky but a single adult female deer tested positive eight miles south of our border in Henry County, Tennessee

High risk areas in Kentucky?

- A surveillance zone was established on Sept 13, 2021 in five counties (Calloway, Carlisle, Fulton, Graves, Marshall) in western Kentucky which are under elevated risk to detect the disease

CDW Related Publications

What is Chronic Wasting Disease? FORFS 21-08

<https://forestry.ca.uky.edu/publication/cwd>

Should my Harvested Deer be Tested? FORFS 21-09

<https://forestry.ca.uky.edu/publication/deer-tested-cwd>

Deer Processing Guide FORFS 21-10

<https://forestry.ca.uky.edu/publication/cwd-deer-processing-guide>



Positive elk exhibiting multiple symptoms.

Photo courtesy: Wyoming Game and Fish Department