Chronic Wasting Disease in Wisconsin

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?
Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was first found in Wisconsin’s wild deer in 2002. It is a 100% fatal disease that causes brain degeneration in deer, elk and moose. Like other prion diseases, CWD can have an incubation period of over a year and clinical symptoms develop slowly. There is currently no known cure.

What causes CWD and how does it spread?
CWD is caused by an infectious pathogen called a prion, an abnormal protein that spreads the disease in the host animal. Transmission may occur when these diseased prions are shed by infected animals through saliva, urine, feces, or through natural decomposition after death, and then contracted by a healthy animal. These prions can persist in the environment for a long period of time and expose other deer to the disease. Unlike many infectious diseases, prions are extremely resistant to destruction and disinfection by normal procedures, making it a challenge to contain.

Clinical signs of CWD
- Drastic weight loss (wasting)
- No fear of humans
- Notable weakness
- Listlessness
- Excessive salivation and drinking
- Drooping of head and ears
- Walking in set patterns and loss of coordination
- Diminished tone of muscles

What can you do to reduce the spread of CWD?
- **Report** any sick deer you see. To find your local DNR staff visit dnr.wi.gov, search keywords “sick deer”.
- **Test** the deer you harvest. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services and Center for Disease Control recommend not consuming meat from CWD-infected deer. Submit samples or heads from harvested adult deer at DNR sampling sites. Testing is free, accurate and helpful for disease monitoring efforts.
- **Don't move** deer carcasses from CWD affected counties to other areas. This can spread the disease to new areas. Movement of infected animals is a key pathway in the spread of CWD across the landscape.
- **Dispose** of carcass waste via your regular municipal waste services or directly in a landfill.

Find a deer carcass waste disposal site near you at: dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/landfillmap.html

Download CWD transmission reduction recommendations at: dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/documents/transmission.pdf

What does baiting and feeding have to do with CWD?
Baiting and feeding cause deer to concentrate within a small area, increasing the likelihood of coming into direct contact with CWD prions in saliva, feces, and urine as they feed. The prions can survive in the environment and be infectious long after the baiting or feeding has concluded, and then indirect disease transmission can occur. Scientific studies have shown there is an increased risk of CWD transmission when many deer are congregated over small food sources, such as bait piles, as well through environmental contamination after the bait is gone.

To learn more about baiting and feeding, visit dnr.wi.gov, search keyword “baiting”.

Even healthy looking deer can be infected.
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Carcass Transportation Requirements and Recommendations

- Do not transport deer carcasses from CWD-affected counties to areas outside the county in which the deer was harvested or an adjacent county, unless it is taken to a licensed meat processor or taxidermist within 72 hours of registration.
- Do not transport deer carcasses from a state or province that has CWD into Wisconsin unless it is taken to a meat processor or taxidermist within 72 hours of entry into the state.
- Use meat processors and taxidermists that dispose of deer waste in a landfill.
- For non-resident hunters, consult your home state’s website or regulations book.

Visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “CWD” for more information and a map of CWD affected counties. Other states may enforce additional carcass transportation restrictions for deer harvested in Wisconsin. Contact the state’s natural resources agency for more information.

CWD sampling is offered every year at various locations throughout Wisconsin. For more information and locations of sampling stations, self-service kiosks or local wildlife staff, visit the DNR website and search keywords “CWD sampling”.

Deer should be registered before being taken to a sampling station. Some stations offer both sampling and electronic registration. Ideally, samples should be taken as soon as possible after harvest. Hunters can expect test results in 10-14 days.

When submitting a sample, hunters must provide the following information:
- Deer harvest authorization number
- DNR customer number
- Contact information
- Location of harvest

What you can do to stop the spread

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Below: A self-service CWD sampling site. These are available 24/7 in select locations to hunters.

Photo: Linda Freshwaters Arndt