

CWD Talking Points for HE Instructors

On May 12, 2021, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR) announced a positive case of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Montgomery County, VA approximately 33 miles from the border of North Carolina. Below are talking points when discussing CWD with the public.

BASIC CWD FACTS:

What is CWD?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease that effects deer, elk, moose, and reindeer/caribou. The source of the disease is an abnormal prion (a form of protein) that collects in the animal's brain cells and other tissues. These prions gradually build in the brain, causing brain cells to die. Once infected, it can take over 16 months for clinical signs to develop, and individuals appear healthy for most of the infection period. There is no cure for the disease and infected animals eventually die. Other types of TSE diseases are mad cow disease and scrapie in sheep.

How does CWD spread?

CWD is thought to be spread by animal-to-animal contact as well as contact with contaminated soils and plants. CWD prions have been detected in urine, feces, blood, saliva, and tissue of infected deer well before showing outward signs of disease and occur at concentrated levels in nervous and lymphatic. CWD prions can be shed in the environment from live deer or deer carcasses, and may persist in the environment for years, potentially decades, and remain infectious to susceptible animals.

What are the physical signs of CWD?

Clinical signs may not develop until up to 16 months after infection. Signs are weight loss, listlessness and lack of coordination, drooling, drinking lots of water and increased urination.

What should someone do if they suspect a deer may have CWD?

Call the District Biologist or the Wildlife Resources Commission Wildlife Helpline at 1-866-318-2401.

How does someone get their harvested deer tested?

Call the District Biologist or the Wildlife Resources Commission Wildlife Helpline at 1-866-318-2401.

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How quickly will test results be back? / How does someone find their test results?

Currently, the turn-around time on receiving results is 3-4 weeks. However, if your sample is confirmed positive, you will be contacted directly.

Hunters who submitted samples with their harvest authorization number can view CWD test results by clicking on "View My Past Harvests" on the agency's Big Game Harvest Reporting webpage.

Can humans get CWD from eating a CWD positive deer?

The World Health Organization states there is no scientific evidence verifying that CWD can infect humans. Since 1997, the World Health Organization has recommended that it is important to keep the agents of all known prion diseases from entering the human food chain. For optimal safety, do **NOT** eat:

- Meat from a deer that looks sick.
- Any of the following organs: brain, eyes, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils, and lymph nodes
- Any meat from an animal that tests positive for the disease.

What kind of impact does CWD have on deer populations?

Experience from CWD positive states and population modeling suggest both short-term and long-term impacts to North Carolina's deer herd and hunting if CWD becomes established. Most deer population models predict notable declines or localized extinction over a period of 50-200 years following CWD introduction. Several states have experienced declines in hunting license sales after the discovery of CWD. Significant declines in hunting license sales or a marked reduction in hunting effort has the potential to impact the state's ability to manage the disease in addition to having a significant impact to the economy.

How does the NCWRC monitor for CWD?

Since 1999, the NCWRC has tested over 15K samples. Five-year systematic surveillance began in 2003 with clinical and opportunistic testing in between years. Since 2018 have been sampling 2000-3000 annually including receiving samples from hunters, meat processors, taxidermists. Additionally, NCDA requires testing of farmed cervids.

What has NCWRC done to prevent CWD from spreading into North Carolina?

NC has rules to minimize risk of primary sources: NCDA farmed cervid rules, general statute preventing importation of susceptible species, and an all-state ban of the importation of high-risk carcass parts. Additionally, a proposed ban on the use of urine and other cervid secretions to attract wildlife is being considered with some low-risk exceptions.

NCWRC RESPONSE TO CWD POSITIVE DEER:

What will happen if a positive CWD deer is detected in NC?

The NCWRC CWD response plan would go into effect which would follow these steps:

1. Form Logistical Response Team
2. Establish 5-mile Primary Surveillance Area (PSA) and 30-mile Secondary Surveillance Area (SSA)
3. Restrict movement of high-risk carcass parts outside of PSA and SSA and provide disposal options.
4. Sampling – Test 50% of the herd within the PSA to determine statistically with high level of confidence the prevalence rate and get a better understanding of the distribution. And sample at a level in the SSA to ensure that if we have additional positives, we have a high likelihood of finding at least 1. Expansion of the agency's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) and regulatory changes (season length, bag limits) to increase hunter harvest may be necessary within the PSA and SSA. Multiple mandatory check stations during 1 full firearms/black powder season in PSA and until sampling goal is met in SSA. Kiosk and other means for hunters outside SSA or PSA to test deer.
5. SSA sampling goals can be achieved with hunter harvest and roadkill. We prefer most if not all samples within the PSA come from hunter harvest, roadkill and/or landowner removal. Removal and testing of deer by trained professionals through sharpshooting may be necessary in the 5-mile area of the PSA if the initial positive CWD detection occurs well outside of the hunting season or sampling goals cannot otherwise be met and would only occur in full cooperation with landowners.

Why do deer need to be dead to test for CWD? / Why can't we collect samples without killing deer?

The only reliable method to test CWD is to collect an obex or lymph nodes that can only be removed from a dead deer.