About the Disease

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease in deer, elk, and moose. The source of the disease is an abnormal prion (a form of protein) that collects in the animal's brain cells. These brain cells eventually burst, leaving behind microscopic empty spaces in the brain matter that give it a “spongy” look. As this occurs, it often causes behavior changes such as decreased interactions with other animals, listlessness, lowering of the head, a blank facial expression, and walking in set patterns (see Signs of Chronic Wasting Disease). CWD is thought to be spread by animal-to-animal contact as well as contact with contaminated soils and plants. It can take over 16 months for signs to develop. Once they do, the infected animals become abnormally thin and eventually die.

Signs of Chronic Wasting Disease

- Isolation from other animals
- Listlessness or showing little or no interest in their surroundings
- Lack of coordination
- Lowering of the head
- Blank facial expressions
- Walking in set patterns
- Drooling and grinding of teeth
- Drinking lots of water and increased urination
- Low weight

Suspicious Deer

If you see a deer or elk exhibiting disease symptoms, you can call your local District Biologist (ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Hunting/Documents/WMDistrictBiologistContacts.pdf) or the Wildlife Resources Commission Wildlife Division at 866-318-2401 or 919-707-4011. Do not validate the animal on your Big Game Harvest Report Card as you may be offered the option of submitting the entire deer to the WRC for disease testing. If you do submit the entire animal for testing, it will not count towards your annual bag limit.

Hunting Outside North Carolina

Anyone returning with a deer, elk, and/or moose taken in any state or province where Chronic Wasting Disease has been confirmed (visit cwd-info.org for details) must follow North Carolina’s processing and packaging regulations, which allows the transportation of:

- Meat that is cut and wrapped
- Quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column (backbone) or head attached
- Meat that has been boned out
- Caped hides
- Cleaned skull plates
- Antlers with no meat or tissue attached
- Cleaned teeth
- Finished taxidermy products
Field Dressing and Butchering

If you are hunting in a state or province where Chronic Wasting Disease has been confirmed, public health and wildlife officials recommend taking the following precautions when pursuing and/or handling deer, elk or moose:

- Do NOT shoot, handle or eat any animal that is acting abnormal or appears to be sick
- Wear latex or rubber gloves when field dressing
- Bone out the meat (Note: don’t saw through bone and avoid cutting through the brain or spinal cord unless removing the head, in which case, use a knife selected for this purpose)
- Minimize the handling of the brain and spinal cord
- Wash hands, boots, and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed
- If you have your deer, elk, or moose commercially processed, request that your animal is processed individually and without meat from other animals

Eating Venison

The World Health Organization states there is no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans. However, the Wildlife Resources Commission recommends people 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

*Normal field dressing coupled with boning out a carcass will remove most (if not all) of these body parts. Cutting away all fatty tissue will remove remaining lymph nodes.