



Chronic Wasting Disease Frequently Asked Questions

What is Chronic Wasting Disease and how is it spread?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a degenerative, fatal brain disease that affects members of the deer family. It is caused by an abnormal prion – a tiny protein particle – that can be transmitted from one animal to another and can accumulate in the environment if shed from infected animals. Animals can be infected with CWD for years before they exhibit signs of the disease. There is currently no treatment or vaccine.

Which species can be affected by CWD?

Most members of the cervid (deer) family are considered to be susceptible to this disease. In the NWT, species that could be at risk of infection include white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose and caribou. In Canada and the United States (US), CWD has been detected in white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk and moose populations. In Norway, CWD has also been found in reindeer. CWD has not been detected in any wildlife species in the NWT, nor has it been detected in caribou populations anywhere in North America.



Barren-ground and boreal caribou ranges and current distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease in Canada (2019)

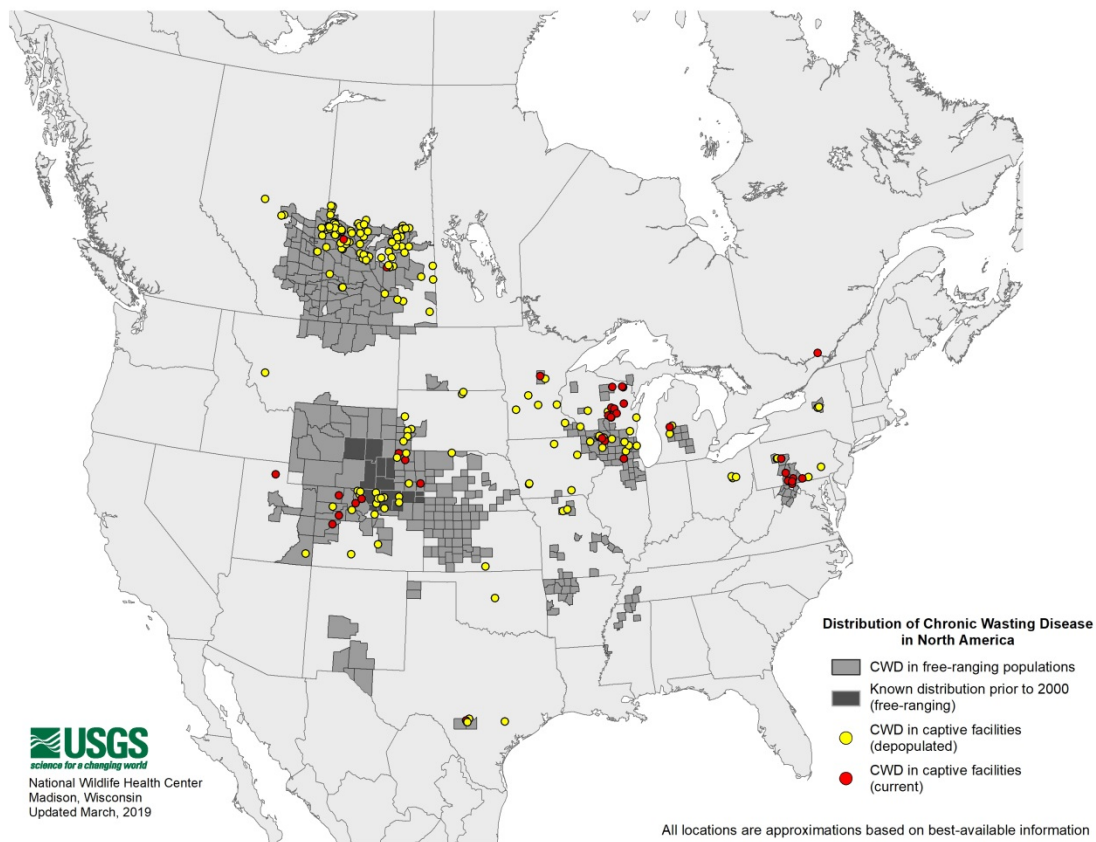


What does the disease look like in an infected animal?

CWD affects an animal's brain, which can interfere with its ability to find food or avoid predation. An animal affected with CWD will progressively lose weight and eventually become very thin. It will often have a thin, patchy coat of hair and may have difficulty walking. If you see an animal that is behaving abnormally or otherwise appears sick, report it to your local Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) office.

Where is CWD currently found?

In Canada, CWD is found in captive and free-ranging populations in parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan. In the US, the disease was first documented in mule deer in a research facility in Colorado in 1967 and has since been detected in 26 states.



Distribution of chronic wasting disease in North America (March 2019)



What is being done to prevent the spread of CWD into the NWT?

ENR is working with hunters and neighbouring jurisdictions to prevent the spread of CWD into the NWT by encouraging hunters to get harvested deer, moose and caribou tested, and by controlling the import of live deer and high-risk deer parts into the NWT.

Ongoing efforts include:

Interagency Collaboration

- The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) works closely with other federal and provincial wildlife agencies to support management of CWD in areas where it is known to occur to help minimize the risk of it spreading to new areas, including the NWT.
- Federal and provincial programs are in place to manage infected animals in CWD-affected areas in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Active Surveillance and Testing

- ENR has had an active Wildlife Health Program since 1990, and works collaboratively with communities, co-management partners and other agencies to monitor the health of wildlife in the NWT.
- A CWD monitoring program is in place, and ENR works with hunters to obtain samples from deer, moose and caribou for testing.
- ENR is proposing a change in regulations to increase access to deer hunting in the NWT as a proactive measure to help monitor and prevent the entry of CWD into the territory. Eligible hunters would be required to use a tag, report their harvest and submit the head of the animal for testing.

Legislation

- The *Wildlife Act* has existing and proposed regulations focused on preventing spread of the disease into the NWT.
- New regulations prohibit the import of live deer and deer parts, with the exception of boned out meat, into the NWT.

Education

- The GNWT provides public information on the signs and symptoms of CWD, and encourages hunters to report animals that are behaving abnormally or otherwise appear sick.

How will I know if a harvested animal has CWD?

Hunters who shoot deer and other cervids in areas where CWD is known to occur should have their animals tested prior to bringing the meat into the NWT. The current samples used for CWD testing include specific lymph nodes behind the throat and part of the brainstem. Contact a local regional ENR office to drop off heads from animals within the NWT to support our sampling and monitoring efforts.



I think I may have harvested an animal with CWD. Is it safe to eat?

At this time, there is no direct scientific evidence to suggest that CWD may be transmitted to humans. However, precautionary measures should be taken when eating and handling all cervids (deer, moose, elk and caribou) harvested in areas where CWD is known to occur. Meat and organs from an animal that is behaving abnormally, looks sick or has tested positive for CWD should not be eaten, and precautions should be taken when handling carcasses.

How can I help?

Protecting wildlife populations from threats, including disease, is a shared responsibility that requires the commitment and action of multiple partners, including the GNWT, federal and provincial governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, and members of the public.

NWT hunters can help by:

- **Participating in ENR sampling programs to monitor for CWD.** This involves submitting the head of any white-tailed or mule deer harvested in the NWT, with or without the tongue and nose. Samples from moose, elk and caribou harvested in the southern NWT may also be submitted.
- **Testing deer species harvested in Alberta or Saskatchewan** through the existing surveillance programs in those provinces. If you are having the meat commercially processed, ask for individual processing to avoid mixing with meat from other animals.
- **Notifying ENR** of any sick deer, moose, elk or caribou.

Where can I find more information?

Wildlife Diseases in the NWT

www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/wildlife-diseases

Field Guide to Wildlife Diseases and Parasites in the NWT

www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/node/1654

Provincial/National wildlife health programs

British Columbia: www.gov.bc.ca/wildlifehealth

Alberta: aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/

Saskatchewan: www.environment.gov.sk.ca/wildlife

Manitoba: www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/environmentalhealth

Yukon: www.env.gov.yk.ca

Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative: http://www.cwhc-rcsf.ca/report_submit.php