

Chronic Wasting Disease in Manitoba



Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a disease that impacts members of the deer (cervid) family. The province has a proactive program for management and surveillance of CWD and has been monitoring wild cervids for the disease since 1997. Manitoba announced its first positive confirmation of CWD in the province on November 1, 2021. This fact sheet provides some helpful information about CWD in Manitoba, management efforts by the province, and how individuals can assist.

What is CWD?

- CWD is an incurable, highly contagious and always fatal disease of the central nervous system that impacts big game members of the deer family, which includes deer, elk, moose and caribou.
- The disease is caused by one or more strains of self-propagating proteins, called prions. Once an animal is infected with CWD, prions begin to replicate, first in the immune system (lymph nodes and tonsils) and later, in the brain, spinal cord and other organs.
- CWD can only be seen under a microscope, and diagnosis is done by testing the central nervous system and lymph node tissues.
- CWD belongs to a group of diseases called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). TSEs tend to be species-specific and scientists believe that most are not naturally transmissible between different species.

How is CWD spread?

- Infected animals shed prions in saliva, feces, urine, blood and possibly, even after death, through their remains.
- CWD spreads from animal to animal, particularly in herds, but can also be spread through the movement of material from dead animals (including, for example, disposal piles for guts).
- Animals can also become infected through the uptake of prions deposited in the environment (eg. shared food sources, contaminated soil) where they can persist for extended periods of time (eg. possibly 5 years or more).
- The probability of transmission goes up in densely used areas and areas where animals concentrate.

What are the impacts to CWD infected animals?

- In early stages, infected animals typically appear normal, while also spreading the disease.
- As the disease progresses, animals tend to be less alert, and less fearful, with a general unhealthy look and obvious weight loss.
- With time, infected animals become very thin and uncoordinated, with drooping ears and heads, are unaware of their surroundings and often have excessive drooling. At this point, death is near.
- There is no cure for CWD. It is always fatal, with animals dying typically within two to three years and sometimes, as long as five years or more from the time of infection.

What are the impacts of CWD to deer, elk, moose and caribou populations?

- When CWD becomes established in an area, population declines have been seen in deer and elk.
- This population level impact can be significant as mature, prime breeding animals are progressively removed from the landscape.
- If the disease were to infect relatively uncommon species like boreal woodland caribou, there is concern these effects may be even greater.
- It is most important to take early, aggressive action to contain an outbreak of the disease.

What are the health risks for people, livestock and other animals?

- Currently, there is no direct evidence that CWD can be spread to humans or other animals, though the science is still developing in this area.
- The World Health Organization, Health Canada, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and numerous other public health agencies recommend against eating meat from CWD-positive animals. Available data suggest that risk of transmission to humans is low, but it is not zero.
- These public health agencies also recommend against feeding meat or other parts of CWD-infected cervids to other animals.



How is Manitoba reducing the risk of CWD in the province?

- Manitoba has had proactive programming in place for prevention and surveillance of CWD in wild cervids since 1997. The program has included mandatory submission of samples from hunters harvesting animals in the Mandatory Surveillance Zone (an area along the western border of the province; details are available in Manitoba's annual [Hunting Guide](#)).
- Manitoba also prohibits the import of native/exotic cervids, the import of unprocessed carcasses, the possession of substances containing bodily fluids, the feeding of cervids in the Mandatory Surveillance Zone and baiting by licensed hunters province-wide.
- Samples from cervids harvested outside the Mandatory Surveillance Zone can also be submitted for CWD testing and results of all hunter submitted samples are made available online at www.manitoba.ca/cwd.
- Manitoba has also produced a fact sheet to provide CWD-related information on Protocols for Harvesting and Testing Cervids in Manitoba. It is available online at www.manitoba.ca/cwd.



Where has CWD been found in Manitoba?

- On November 1, 2021, Manitoba announced the first CWD positive animal found in the province, located on the west side of the province near Lake of the Prairies. A mule deer in this area was observed to be unhealthy; it was euthanized, tested and confirmed to be infected with CWD.
- Manitoba is continuing its CWD surveillance program and will inform the public of any future detections, online at www.manitoba.ca/cwd.

Where else is CWD present in North America?

- CWD has been found in wild deer, elk and moose populations in Saskatchewan and Alberta and in many US states. There have also been CWD outbreaks on deer and elk farms in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Quebec and in many US states.

What can I do to reduce the risks associated with CWD?

- Avoid contact with any wild animal that appears to be sick and if you observe any of the following situations, report it to a conservation officer as soon as possible:
 - Any signs of illness or disease in deer, elk, moose and caribou
 - Sightings of elk, moose, and white-tailed deer with ear tags
 - Locations where elk, moose, and white-tailed deer are congregating near hay bales or feedlots
 - Report illegal feeding sites, and do not intentionally feed any cervids
- Continue to hunt big game in Manitoba. This benefits wildlife by managing over-abundance, and by dispersing big game, which reduces close contact between individuals.
- Contribute samples from your harvested animals for CWD testing. There is no CWD test available for living animals, thus the province relies on testing samples from harvested animals. While it is mandatory to submit samples from animals harvested in the Mandatory Surveillance Zone, hunters are encouraged to submit samples from the Voluntary Surveillance Zone along the U.S.A. border, or elsewhere in the province.
- When harvesting animals, leave organs or hides in the place of origin to compost in a responsible manner (eg. away from open view, water bodies, and buildings), or otherwise dispose of responsibly.
- Read Manitoba's fact sheet about CWD-related information on Protocols for Harvesting and Testing Cervids in Manitoba. It provides information about protecting human health; collecting and submitting biological samples for CWD testing; and recommendations for disposal and clean-up.

For more information about CWD in Manitoba visit www.manitoba.ca/cwd. Questions about CWD can be emailed to cwd@manitoba.ca.

To report signs of illness in wildlife, sightings of cervids with ear tags, illegal feeding sites, and locations where cervids are congregating near hay bales or feedlots, contact a conservation officer in the local district office or call the TIP line at 1-800-782-0076.