

# Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) - Quick Reference

## *Information for Rhode Island Hunters*



- **Chronic Wasting Disease** is a fatal brain disease that affects the behavior and physical condition of deer, moose, and elk. This disease has not been documented in Rhode Island; however, surveillance for the disease is ongoing and essential to the health of our deer herd.
- **Transmission** – CWD is transmitted through physical contact (nose-to-nose contact and decaying carcasses), environmental contact (the area where a carcass decomposed), or through infected feed. CWD may persist in the soil after a carcass has decomposed.
- **Chronic Wasting Disease Endemic Areas:** Any county or state bordering a county where CWD has been documented, including the following states – Colorado, Wyoming, New York, West Virginia, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, New Mexico, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Montana, Utah or the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan or Alberta.
- **Symptoms of CWD in Deer**
  - Poor body condition with ribs showing and drooping ears and head.
  - Excessive drooling and thirst; sick deer may be found close to water.
  - May also walk repetitive courses, have sluggish behavior, and isolate itself from the herd.
  - If you see a sick deer, document the location of the animal and report it to DEM Fish and Wildlife at 401-789-0281. Do not attempt to contact, disturb, kill, or remove the animal.
- **Human Risk and CWD** – Hunters have been eating deer from the infected areas of Colorado and Wyoming for more than 30 years. There has *never been* a verified case of someone contracting the human variant from exposures to CWD. However, there has *not* been significant research to conclude humans are immune.
- **Why shouldn't I eat certain parts of my deer?** Research shows that the disease accumulates only in certain parts of infected animals – the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils, and spleen. Based on these findings, hunters are recommended to bone out their animals and consume only muscle tissue from animals harvested in CWD areas.
- **Rhode Island Surveillance Plan:** Rhode Island's plan is to continue annual surveillance for CWD to insure early detection and disease free status by sampling deer tissues (deer heads). This plan also include education for hunters and the public about Rhode Islands live deer and carcass importation ban to ensure disease prevention.

### ❖ **Recommendations for Hunters**

- **Avoid using natural urine scent lures, use synthetic products instead.** If you do choose to use a natural urine-based scent lure keep in mind that natural urine scents may come from contaminated captive deer and can transmit prions indirectly via surface and soil contact. Avoid placing urine on ground or on vegetation where deer can reach this. Use canisters or wicks to deploy lures off natural surfaces. Synthetic products (lures) are available and are the recommended alternative.
- Wear latex or rubber gloves. Bone all meat. Don't saw through bone. Removal of fatty tissue will remove all lymph glands
- Disinfect butchering equipment (knives, saws) with a 50/50 solution of chlorine bleach (household bleach works well).
- Commercial operators should bone the deer, and keep your meat separate from other deer. Lymph glands should be removed prior to grinding the meat.
- If you use a saw to remove the antlers, it should be cleaned and disinfected afterwards. This saw should not be used on any other part of the carcass. If you keep the entire skull (for a European mount), you should insure that all meat is removed, wear rubber or latex gloves while doing this, and soak the head in chlorine bleach.

- Bones, hides and waste should be double bagged in strong garbage bags and disposed of at a landfill with an approved dead animal pit, or buried.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals
- **Donate your harvested deer's head for CWD testing by contacting Fish and Wildlife at 401-789-0281**
  
- **Regulations for the importation of deer parts:** No person shall import or possess in Rhode Island the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils, or spleen of any cervid (defined as a member of the family Cervidae, including white-tailed deer, mule deer, black-tailed deer, elk, moose, caribou, and reindeer) taken in or originating from a CWD endemic area, or such parts from captive or captive-bred cervid obtained from outside Rhode Island, except that: such parts and carcasses may be transported through Rhode Island as part of an interstate shipment.
  
- **Permitted Carcasses and Parts:**
  - **CWD Endemic Areas:** Meat may be imported and possessed provided that all such meat from an individual animal shall be boned, cut up, packaged and wrapped, and such meat shall not be commingled with the meat of any other:
    - The hide or cape;
    - The skull-cap with antlers attached;
    - The antlers;
    - Finished taxidermy;
    - Tanned hides;
    - The upper canine.
  
  - **Non-CWD Endemic Areas:** All parts and carcasses may be imported into the State, following guidelines set forth in the following section.
    - All carcasses and parts of any cervid imported into Rhode Island, or packages or containers containing such carcasses or parts, shall be affixed with a legible label bearing the following information: the species of animal, the State, Province or County where the animal was taken or where the shipment originated, the name of the person who took the animal or the name of the shipper, the address of the taker or shipper and, for transport through the State, the destination of the shipment. Hunter harvested carcasses, parts or meat taken outside Rhode Island shall also bear the marking, tagging or labeling required by the State where the animal was taken.
  
- **Advice for landowners: Do not feed Deer, it is illegal and spreads disease.** Feeding wildlife, either directly or indirect, can generate artificially high densities which increases the potential for disease spread through infected feed and/or close contact among individuals.
  
- **What you can do to help:**  
Please report any sick deer exhibiting unusual symptoms to:
  - **Rhode Island Environmental Police** **401-222-3070**
  - **DEM Fish and Wildlife (Great Swamp)** **401-789-0281**