

# Chronic Wasting Disease in Manitoba

**Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a disease that affects deer, elk, moose and caribou – members of the deer (cervid) family. These species are important to Manitoba ecologically, as a source of food security, and provide important cultural, social, and economic values for many Manitobans. First discovered in the 1960s, CWD has been detected in the majority of US states and numerous Canadian provinces. Manitoba has been monitoring wild cervids for the disease since 1997 and announced its first confirmed case of CWD in November 2021.**

**Manitoba's first priority is ensuring that people who make use of deer and other cervids as a food source are educated about CWD. This fact sheet provides information about the disease, what precautions people can take to prevent this disease from spreading, and how the public can assist with CWD management and surveillance.**

## What is CWD?

- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an incurable, highly contagious and always fatal disease of the central nervous system that affects members of the deer (cervid) family – deer, elk, moose and caribou.
- The disease is caused by one or more strains of misfolded and self-propagating proteins, called prions. Once an animal is infected with CWD, prions begin to replicate in the brain, spinal cord and other nervous system tissue, and accumulate in the immune system structures such as lymph nodes and tonsils.
- CWD is one of the most significant challenges in North American wildlife management. If allowed to establish and spread, it could negatively impact the health of wild cervid populations.
- In areas where CWD has become established, studies have shown decreases in cervid survival, life expectancy, reproductive potential and population decline.
- If CWD becomes established in Manitoba, eradication will become impossible and negative impacts on the health of wild deer populations are expected.

## How is CWD spread?

- CWD can be spread by infected animals (dead or alive) and persist in the environment for years.
- Before they appear sick, CWD-positive animals can shed prions present in saliva, feces and urine.
- CWD spreads from animal to animal, particularly in herds, but can also be spread through the movement of prions deposited into the environment (eg. soil, food sources and mineral licks) as well as after death through their remains (eg. disposal piles for guts).
- The natural movement of infected animals across the landscape as well as movement of infected carcasses and associated by-products contribute to the spread of CWD to new areas.

## Can people get CWD?

- While there have been no cases of CWD in people, recent and on-going studies suggest that caution is warranted.
- Public health agencies including the World Health Organization, Health Canada, and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommend against eating meat from CWD-positive animals.
- These agencies also recommend against feeding meat or other parts of CWD-positive cervids to other animals.
- Hunters who are active in areas where CWD is a concern should have their harvested animal tested, practice safe carcass-handling protocols and avoid consumption of any animal that has tested positive for CWD.

## What are the symptoms of CWD?

- CWD is a progressive disease, meaning that in early stages, infected animals typically appear normal, while also spreading the disease. As the disease progresses, animals tend to be less alert, and fearful, with a general unhealthy look and obvious weight loss.
- In late stages, infected animals become very thin and uncoordinated, with drooping ears and heads, are unaware of their surroundings and often experience excessive drooling, drinking and urination.
- No cure exists for CWD. It is always fatal, with infected animals typically dying within two to three years but sometimes survive as long as five years or more from the time of infection.
- CWD infection can only be confirmed under a microscope, and formal diagnosis is done by testing the central nervous system and lymph node tissues.

## What is Manitoba doing to reduce the risk of CWD?

- Manitoba has programs in place for CWD surveillance in wild cervids. Programs include actively collecting and testing for CWD in the deer and elk samples submitted by hunters harvesting animals in the Mandatory Surveillance Zone.
- Manitoba is developing an adaptive CWD Emergency Response Plan to address any detection of CWD in both wild and farmed cervids.
- Manitoba prohibits the import of native/exotic cervids, the import of unprocessed carcasses, the possession of substances containing cervid bodily fluids, the feeding of cervids in the Mandatory Surveillance Zone and baiting by licensed hunters province-wide.
- Manitoba has undertaken numerous other CWD control measures since initial detection of the disease. For information about Manitoba's response, go to [www.manitoba.ca/cwd](http://www.manitoba.ca/cwd).

## What can you do to assist with CWD management in Manitoba?

- 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:



- o Any signs of illness or disease in deer, elk, moose and caribou
- o Sightings of elk, moose, and white-tailed deer with ear tags
- o Locations where elk, moose, and white-tailed deer are congregating near hay bales or feedlots
- o Illegal feeding sites
- When harvesting in the mandatory surveillance zone, contribute samples from your harvested animals for CWD testing.
- To reduce potential disease spread, when harvesting animals, field dress and leave organs or hides near where they were killed to compost in a responsible manner (eg. away from open view, water bodies, and buildings), or otherwise dispose of through approved landfill sites.
- 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.
- Read Manitoba's fact sheet: Chronic Wasting Disease: Protocols for Harvesting and Testing Cervids in Manitoba. It provides information about precautions to take when harvesting, collecting and submitting biological samples for CWD testing, and recommendations for disposal and clean-up.

Information can be found at [www.manitoba.ca/cwd](http://www.manitoba.ca/cwd)

For more information about CWD and Manitoba's response, visit [www.manitoba.ca/cwd](http://www.manitoba.ca/cwd)  
email [cwg@gov.mb.ca](mailto:cwd@gov.mb.ca) or call 1-800-214-6497.

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.