



# CWD MANAGEMENT

## Chronic Wasting Disease Frequently Asked Questions

### 2019 CWD Priority Sampling Areas by Hunt District

#### **Q. What is Montana doing to manage CWD?**

A. In 2019, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will continue chronic wasting disease surveillance in high-priority areas in parts of northern, western and southern Montana, primarily from hunter-harvested animals. Hunters who harvest a deer, elk or moose in these areas should stop at a local CWD-sampling check station to have the animal sampled. FWP staff will collect samples and submit them for testing.

There will be Special CWD Hunts occurring during the general hunting season around Libby and in the southeast portion of hunting district 400. All animals taken in these Special CWD Hunt areas must be sampled. Visit [FWP.mt.gov](http://FWP.mt.gov) for details.

Hunters who want to have samples tested from outside FWP established survey areas can have them tested and FWP will cover the costs. Prior to the general season hunters can view the FWP web site, collect samples themselves and mail them to the FWP Lab. Starting with the general season hunters can still submit samples themselves or take the samples or a deer/elk/moose head to Regional offices for assistance. For more information, visit [fwp.mt.gov/cwd](http://fwp.mt.gov/cwd).

#### **Q. Where has CWD been found in Montana?**

A. CWD was first found in the wild in October 2017. To date, CWD has been detected in Lincoln, Carbon, Liberty, Hill, Blaine, Phillips, Valley, Daniels, and Sheridan Counties.

CWD Management Zones are areas where CWD is known to exist. To prevent the spread of CWD from infected areas of Montana to other parts of the state, the whole carcass, whole head, brain, or spinal column from any deer, elk, or moose harvested within a CWD Management Zone may not be removed from that Management Zone unless the animal has tested negative for CWD. Transport restrictions only apply to animals harvested within a CWD Management Zone

Currently, there are four CWD Management Zones:

**Northern Montana CWD Management Zone** – Hunting Districts 400, 401, 600, 611, 640, 641 and 670 including the communities of Shelby, Havre, Malta, Glasgow, and others on the defined boundaries.

**Southern Montana CWD Management Zone** – Hunting Districts 502 and 510, that portion of



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HD 520 east of Hwy 212, that portion of HD 575 north and east of Hwy 78, that portion of HD 590 south of Interstate 90, that portion of HD 704 south of Hwy 212, including the communities of Billings, Broadus, and others on the defined boundaries.

**Yellowstone County CWD Management Zone** – All of Yellowstone County and the portion of Big Horn County north of Interstate 90 and west of the Big Horn River.

**Libby CWD Management Zone** - That portion of Lincoln County bounded on the north by Barron, Pipe, and Seventeen Mile roads; on the west by USFS Libby Ranger District Boundary; on the south by Bear and Libby creeks and south boundaries of TWP's T29N, R29W and R30W; on the east by Fisher River to Hwy 37, Kootenai River, and Lake Koocanusa.

## **Q. What can you do about CWD?**

A. Ways to help:

- Report any sick-looking deer, elk or moose to FWP.
- If you harvest a deer, elk or moose in a priority sampling area, stop at a check station to have your animal sampled. If you harvest an animal in one of the CWD Management Zones, have it tested before eating it.
- Take precautions: When field dressing your animal, wear gloves and eye protection and minimize handling brain and spinal tissue. For more information, go to [fwp.mt.gov/cwd](http://fwp.mt.gov/cwd).
- If you harvest a deer, elk or moose outside of a priority sampling area and are interested in knowing the CWD status of your animal, send your sample to the FWP lab in Bozeman. For more information, visit [fwp.mt.gov/cwd](http://fwp.mt.gov/cwd).

## **Q. How do you test for CWD?**

A. To determine whether an animal is infected, a certified CWD-testing diagnostic laboratory must test an animal's retropharyngeal lymph nodes or brainstem for evidence of CWD. These samples can only be collected from dead animals. Unfortunately, there are no non-invasive CWD tests for live animals. For research purposes, rectal or tonsil biopsies from live animals will work, but these tests are less sensitive and require capture, anesthesia and minor surgery, making them impractical for widespread surveillance.

## **Q. How can a hunter submit his or her own sample?**

A. Here are the steps.

- Remove the retropharyngeal lymph nodes, located in the animal's throat area. A video is available on the [FWP website](http://fwp.mt.gov/cwd) that demonstrates the process (look under "Submitting Your Own Sample").



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- Fill out a Hunter Harvest Submission Form, which is available on the FWP website, and include a phone number and email address so FWP can send a **unique CWD number**. This CWD number is what hunters will use to look up test results online at [fwp.mt.gov/CWD](http://fwp.mt.gov/CWD). Be sure to record the location of harvest as accurately as possible. **Samples without location information will not be tested.**
- Put the lymph nodes in resealable bag, double bag the sample, and wrap the bag in a paper towel.
- Put the filled-out submission form in a separate resealable bag so it doesn't get wet and include it with the sample. If you are sending samples from more than one animal fill out a separate submission form for each animal and make sure that each form is with the correct sample in a sealed bag.
- ☐ Place the bagged samples, an ice pack, and the bagged submission form(s) in a small box or shipping envelope and send via your choice of postal carrier. FWP recommends using a carrier that offers tracking and can deliver samples within 24-48 hours to prevent the samples from rotting. Please try to ship samples on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday of each week, and avoid shipping on holidays, to prevent the samples from sitting over the weekend.
- Send to:
  - Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
**ATTN: Wildlife Health Lab (CWD)**  
1400 S. 19th Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718
- Test results will be posted online within three weeks.

## **Q. How long will it take for me to find out if my deer has CWD?**

A. If your animal is sampled by FWP staff at a check station or regional office during the general surveillance season or during a special hunt, results will be posted online ([fwp.mt.gov/cwd](http://fwp.mt.gov/cwd)) within three weeks. We recommend obtaining results before consuming meat from deer killed within a CWD Management Zone. If your harvested deer is found to be positive, you can dispose of the meat appropriately at a landfill and FWP may provide you with a new license.

## **Q. Who pays for sampling?**

A. In 2019, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will continue chronic wasting disease surveillance in high-priority areas in parts of northern, western and southern Montana, primarily from hunter-harvested animals. Hunters who harvest a deer, elk or moose in these areas should stop at a local CWD-sampling check station to have the animal sampled. FWP staff will collect samples and submit them for testing.

There will be Special CWD Hunts occurring during the general hunting season around Libby and in the southeast portion of hunting district 400. All animals taken in these Special CWD Hunt areas must be sampled. Visit [FWP.mt.gov](http://FWP.mt.gov) for details.



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In other areas across the state, FWP will pay for sampling for hunters who collect their own samples and send them to the FWP lab in Bozeman.

## **Q. For animals taken outside a sampling area, who is responsible for shipping and paying for shipping those samples to the lab?**

- WITHIN the sampling areas, FWP will collect samples, pay for postage to the FWP lab, and pay for testing.
- OUTSIDE the sampling areas, the hunter can collect their own sample, be responsible for getting it to a **regional office**, then FWP will pay to ship it to the FWP lab and pay for testing
- OR
- OUTSIDE the sampling area, the hunter can collect their own sample, fill out the information sheet and mail it to the lab per the online instructions. The hunter will pay for shipping to the lab, but not for the test.
- OR
- OUTSIDE the sampling areas, the hunter can bring their head to a regional office or **CWD** check station, FWP will collect their sample, pay to ship it to the FWP lab, and pay for testing.

## **Q. Can humans be infected by CWD?**

A. There is no known transmission of CWD to humans. However, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that hunters harvesting a deer, elk, or moose from an area where CWD is known to be present have their animal tested for CWD prior to consuming the meat, and to not consume the meat if the animal tests positive.

Some simple precautions should be taken when field dressing deer, particularly in CWD Management Zones:

- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection when field dressing your deer.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed.
- Avoid processing and consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals. (Normal field dressing coupled with boning out a carcass will essentially remove these parts.)

## **Q. What is Chronic Wasting Disease and how do deer, elk and moose catch it?**

A. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is one type of a class of diseases called Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs) that infects members of the deer family, including deer, elk, moose, and caribou. TSEs are caused by infectious, mis-folded prion proteins (not a virus, bacteria, or fungus) which cause normal prion proteins throughout a healthy animal's body to



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mis-fold, resulting in organ damage and eventual death. These prions are found throughout bodily tissues and secretions and are shed into the environment before and after death. When other animals come in contact with the prions, either from infected animals or from contaminated environments, they can be infected. The disease is slow acting, degenerative, and always fatal. The name comes from the appearance of symptomatic animals, which get very skinny and sick-looking before they die.

## **Q. Where does CWD come from?**

A. The origin of CWD is unknown. It was discovered in 1967 in mule deer at a research facility in Colorado. Shortly thereafter it was also found in captive mule deer and elk in Ontario, Colorado and Wyoming. By the 1990s, it was discovered in wild white-tailed and mule deer, elk and moose in Colorado and Wyoming and among captive animals in Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Montana and Oklahoma. By the early 2000s, CWD was found in the wild in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Illinois and Wisconsin. CWD has continued to spread. As of 2018, it has been found in captive or free-ranging herds in 26 states, three Canadian provinces, Norway, Finland and South Korea. CWD was found among wild deer in Montana in 2017.

## **Q. What carcass parts can be removed from a CWD Management Zone?**

A. Carcass parts that may be taken out of the CWD Management Areas include:

- Meat that is cut and wrapped or meat that is boned out
- Quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached
- Hides with no heads attached
- Skull plates or antlers with no meat or tissue attached
- Skulls that have been boiled and cleaned to remove flesh and tissue
- Upper canine teeth
- Head, partial body or whole-body mounts prepared by a taxidermist

## **Q. Can I transport a deer, elk or moose carcass from another state into Montana?**

A. No. It is unlawful to transport into Montana a whole carcass, whole head, brain or spinal column from white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose or elk from states or Canadian provinces that have experienced CWD. CWD-positive states and provinces include Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec.

## **Q. What animal parts can be brought into Montana from another state?**

A. Meat that is cut and wrapped or meat that has been separated from the bone; quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached; hides with no heads attached; skull plates or antlers with no meat or tissue attached; skulls that have been boiled



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and cleaned to remove all flesh and tissue; upper canine teeth; head, partial body, or whole-body mounts prepared by a taxidermist.

## **Q. Why is CWD management important?**

A. Without management, CWD will spread, increase in prevalence, and may cause population declines in deer and elk as it has in other states. FWP is committed to doing all it can to keep our wildlife healthy so that hunting continues for generations to come. FWP's goal is to effectively manage the disease in wild populations and limit the prevalence and spread of CWD. There are no vaccines for CWD so management and prevention are critical to help prevent long-term population decline in infected herds, slow the decline of wildlife-related recreation opportunities, and control potential declines in property value.

## **Q. How did CWD get to Montana?**

A. CWD infections along our northern and southern borders are likely the result of the natural spread of the disease from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Wyoming to Montana. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Wyoming have documented CWD-positive deer close to Montana's border. CWD is also found in neighboring North and South Dakota.

## **Q. Where is Montana looking for CWD?**

A. FWP has identified priority surveillance areas near states and provinces with CWD where we will be focusing our surveillance efforts (see online map). These areas have been identified as those at highest risk of becoming infected through the natural spread of the disease. We will periodically update our priority surveillance areas as new information on CWD within the state becomes available. Since CWD could be spread through the inadvertent or illegal movement of a CWD-positive deer or elk carcass into the state, we also plan to periodically survey other areas of the state that fall outside of the high-priority surveillance zones.

## **Q. Can CWD be eradicated?**

A. After decades of CWD management across the country, most agencies and researchers agree that CWD cannot be eradicated once it infects a herd. Other states have attempted eradication and set up unreasonable expectations with hunters and the public. Eradication is not the goal of FWP.

## **Q. How will CWD impact Montana's deer and elk herds?**

A. The short answer is we don't know. If CWD infects enough animals, it will probably reduce the herd in the long term. Other states have seen deer populations decline when CWD infects 20 to 40 percent of a herd. In Wyoming, heavily-infected herds of mule deer declined 21 percent *per year* and whitetails declined by 10 percent. Colorado saw a 45 percent decline in infected mule deer herds over 20 years. Clearly, if left unchecked, CWD could result in large-



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scale population declines.

Because the distribution and intensity of CWD infections are variable across a broad landscape, the impacts across the landscape will also be variable. Keeping deer numbers down and dispersed, and reducing buck:doe ratios, may keep the prevalence low and manageable. Fish, Wildlife & Parks' focus will be on managing CWD-infected areas for prevalence at 5 percent or lower and preventing spread. This may also mean keeping deer or elk numbers low.

## **Q. How can you tell if an animal has CWD?**

A. Animals with CWD cannot be diagnosed based on clinical signs because they are unspecific and mild at the beginning of the disease. Diagnosis is therefore made by testing tissues from the central nervous system and lymph nodes. Symptoms of infected animals can include emaciation, excessive salivation, lack of muscle coordination, difficulty swallowing, excessive thirst and excessive urination. Clinically ill animals may have an exaggerated wide posture, may stagger and carry the head and ears lowered, and are often found consuming large amounts of water. However, these symptoms don't appear until the terminal stage of the disease. It is important to remember that infected animals may not have symptoms but can still be shedding infectious prions. All CWD-positive deer sampled in 2018 appeared outwardly normal and healthy.

## **Q. What happens if I shoot a sick deer?**

A. This circumstance will be handled on a case-by-case basis. In the past, FWP has provided new licenses for people who have harvested sick animals that were inedible. However, since circumstances vary, we do not have a blanket policy. Guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise that if you hunt in a CWD-positive area, have your deer, elk, or moose tested before consuming the meat. If it tests positive, dispose of the meat in a landfill. If you have harvested an animal that appears sick, contact your local FWP office.

## **Q. What is a Special CWD Hunt?**

A. A Special CWD Hunt may be initiated following the detection of CWD outside of existing CWD Management Zones. This hunt may be held during the following hunting season and will be designed to sample enough harvested animals to determine the prevalence and spatial distribution of the disease. Special rules and regulations will apply. Additional Special CWD Hunt B Licenses may be made available to accomplish the desired harvest level. All animals harvested during a special hunt must be brought to FWP Special CWD Hunt check stations for sampling and to be tagged with a tag reading "MTFWP CWD TEST" and a unique identification number.

To prevent spread of the disease, new CWD Management Zone boundaries may be defined, and brain and spinal column material of animals taken during a Special CWD Hunt will not be allowed out of the Management Zone boundaries. The Special CWD Hunt will end when enough deer are sampled to precisely measure the prevalence and spatial distribution of the disease,



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which is estimated to be between 150-400 animals.

## **Q. Why should ranchers and farmers care about CWD?**

A. FWP uses hunters as a key tool to help ranchers, farmers and other landowners manage the impact of wildlife on their property and to their crops and livestock. If CWD were to increase in prevalence, FWP anticipates some localized decline in hunting interest. Additionally, in many parts of the state, property values are tied to existing recreational values. Hunting and wildlife viewing are key components. If CWD was left unmanaged and prevalence were to increase uncontrolled, it may impact property values.

Recent research has shown that plants, including plants used for livestock food, can uptake CWD prions from the soil. If continued research shows that animals can catch CWD by eating infected plants, it could have huge repercussions on the agricultural industry. Concerns nationally and internationally about CWD transmission through feed has led many states and other countries to restrict the sale of such products from CWD-positive areas. It is already the case that deer and elk protein (mostly from game farms) from CWD areas cannot be used in livestock feed.

## **Q. Why should business owners care about CWD?**

A. In Montana, outfitting and hunting make significant contributions to local economies. Across the state, deer, elk and antelope hunting brings in about \$400 million. This includes hotels, restaurants and gas stations in big and small communities. We anticipate the possibility that CWD may initially slow interest in deer hunting in the affected area. Effective management will require participation from hunters and support from communities.