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Chronic Wasting Disease

Last Modified:



Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a deadly, neurological illness that affects deer, elk, moose, reindeer, and muntjac. It may also affect some other members of the Cervidae family.

Unlike most infectious diseases, CWD isn't caused by bacteria or a virus, but rather by misfolded natural proteins called prions. When these proteins fold incorrectly, they kill brain cells. Infected animals appear healthy for months or years. Then in the

final stages of disease, they become debilitated and ultimately die. How fast CWD progresses depends on the species and the animal's genetics.

Funding Opportunity

FY 2024 chronic wasting disease (CWD) funding opportunities open now!

[View Open Funding Opportunities](#)

What To Look For

Other diseases may present in a similar manner, so post-mortem testing is required to verify CWD. Here's what to look for:

- Weight loss
- Frequent urination
- Poor coordination
- Drooping ears
- Drooling
- Difficulty swallowing
- Aspiration pneumonia

How To Prevent This Disease

CWD is a disease of the central nervous system caused by a prion that often presents as wasting. You can reduce the risk of CWD spreading to and infecting a farmed cervid herd by maintaining strict biosecurity. If you are just starting to raise farmed cervids consider raising a species that is not known to be susceptible to CWD. For white-tailed deer herds, you can reduce CWD spread by breeding for less susceptible animals.

We also encourage producers to enroll in the [Chronic Wasting Disease Herd Certification Program](#). The goal of the program is to provide a consistent, national approach to control the incidence of CWD in farmed cervids and prevent the interstate spread of CWD.

Report Signs of Animal Disease

Producers or owners who suspect an animal disease should contact their veterinarian to evaluate the animal or herd. [Find an accredited veterinarian](#).

Animal health professionals (veterinarians; diagnostic laboratories; public health, zoo, or wildlife personnel; and others) report diagnosed or suspected cases of [nationally listed reportable animal diseases](#) to [APHIS District Offices](#) and to the [State animal health official](#) as applicable under State reporting regulations.

Controlling Chronic Wasting Disease

Information for Cooperators and Veterinarians

Testing for CWD

- [Collection Card](#) (184.18 KB): This offers a pictorial guide for proper post-mortem sample collection for CWD.
- [APHIS-Approved Testing Laboratories](#): Use this list to locate labs in your area that can conduct testing to verify CWD. Contact the laboratory before submitting samples to ensure they have funding available to conduct the test.

Help Minimize the Spread of CWD

You can reduce the risk of CWD spreading to and infecting a farmed cervid herd by maintaining strict biosecurity and raising cervid species that are resistant or less susceptible to CWD. For white-tailed deer herds, you can reduce CWD spread by breeding for less susceptible animals.

Wildlife Disease Surveillance and Research

APHIS Wildlife Services conducts surveillance and research on dozens of wildlife diseases, including [chronic wasting disease](#). For more information, visit our [National Wildlife Disease Program](#) and [National Wildlife Research Center](#).

Funding Opportunities

APHIS provides millions of dollars each year to State and Tribal governments, universities, and others to control CWD in wild and farmed cervids. Learn more at [Chronic Wasting Disease Management and Response Funding Opportunities](#).

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