

Chronic Wasting Disease



What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a degenerative, progressive, fatal brain disease that affects cervids (white tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose and reindeer). Although caribou are considered susceptible to the disease, it has not been detected in caribou in North America. There is no cure for CWD. Control efforts have been unable to eradicate the disease when it has occurred in the wild.

CWD has not been found in the Yukon. Regulations are in place to help prevent it from being brought in by hunters who harvest cervid species in areas where CWD may occur. Northern B.C. and N.W.T. are exempt from the regulation because these areas are currently considered at low risk of having CWD.

Why is it important to prevent CWD?

CWD was first identified in 1967 in Colorado and was found in Canada in 1996. Despite efforts to eradicate it by culling thousands of deer, it has spread through wild deer in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, as well as in over 35 U.S. states. There is no treatment or vaccine for CWD. It would be devastating for it to spread to Yukon animals such as moose or caribou.

CWD is caused by a tiny infectious protein called a prion. It can contaminate the soil and may persist for many years, so the introduction of CWD into the Yukon would have long-term impacts. While it may be spread by natural migration of wild cervids, it can also spread through transportation of infected meat and other carcass parts. This is why it is prudent to avoid bringing potentially infective body tissues into the Yukon from other jurisdictions.

Clinical signs and human health

Animals infected with the prion that causes CWD may not show signs for years. Over time, symptoms such as weight loss, listlessness, depression, weakness and behavioral changes progress to death.

It is recommended that meat from affected animals should not be eaten. CWD is very similar to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) that can infect people and the risk of transmission of CWD to humans can not be ruled out.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Animal Health and Protection at animalhealth@yukon.ca or 867-667-5600.



Don't risk bringing CWD back home if you hunt outside the Yukon

The body tissues that can spread CWD include:

- the brain,
- spinal cord,
- eyes,
- spleen and
- lymph nodes (small glands throughout the entrails and under the hide).

If you hunt cervids outside the Yukon, only bring meat that has been separated from the head and spinal column into the Yukon. Leave the head, spinal column and all internal organs (entrails) in the location where the animal was harvested.

If the head is a trophy, the antlers with the attached skull cap may be brought back to the Yukon provided that all meat, tissue and brain are removed from the skull cap. The hide or cape can be brought back to Yukon in a leak-proof container until tanning or taxidermy.

If you have returned to the Yukon with portions of a cervid (moose, caribou, elk, white tailed deer and mule deer) that are prohibited such as the brain or head, please contact a conservation officer to make arrangements to have the portions examined. Working together, we can reduce the risk of CWD affecting wildlife in the Yukon.

Testing cervids in the Yukon

The Animal Health Unit conducts surveillance for CWD in the Yukon by collecting samples from deer, elk, moose or caribou harvested or found dead. If you would like to submit the head from a cervid for CWD testing, bring it to a Department of Environment office. Samples from the head are collected by trained Department of Environment staff and sent to a lab for testing. The head can be returned to you after sampling is complete if requested.

We encourage you to contact a conservation officer or the Animal Health Unit (867-667-5600, animalhealth@yukon.ca) if you have any questions.



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