

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE (CWD)



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1. What is CWD?

A1. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease found in species of the deer family (“cervids”). It belongs to a family of diseases caused by prions (abnormally shaped proteins). This particular prion attacks the brains of infected deer, elk and moose, causing the animals to display abnormal behavior, become uncoordinated and emaciated, and eventually die.

Q2. What wildlife species are affected by CWD?

A2. All four of the species of the deer family in Colorado are known to be naturally susceptible to CWD: elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose. Natural susceptibility appears to be limited to species that are members of the deer family (cervids) and not pronghorn, bighorn sheep and mountain goat.

Q3. Does Colorado have CWD?

A3. Yes. CWD has been found in deer, elk and moose herds in various locations in Colorado. About half of Colorado’s deer herds and one-third of our elk herds are known to be infected with CWD. A map of locations is included in CPW’s Big Game Brochure, and highlights game management units in red where CWD has been detected: [Big Game unit map](#)

Q4. Is there a risk to humans?

A4. Disease in humans resulting from CWD exposure has not been reported to date. However, there may be a small risk from eating meat from infected animals. Consequently, public health officials recommend that people avoid exposure to CWD-infected animals. Please see the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment website (www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/prion-diseases) for the most current recommendations on carcass testing and other preventive measures.

Q5. What CWD precautions and preventative measures should hunters take?

A5. To minimize exposure to CWD and other diseases of potential concern, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and state public health officials advise hunters not to shoot, handle or consume any deer, elk or moose that is acting abnormally or appears to be sick. When field-dressing game, wear rubber gloves and minimize the use of a bone saw to cut through the brain or spinal cord (backbone). Minimize contact with brain or spinal cord tissues, eyes, spleen or lymph nodes. Always wash hands and utensils thoroughly after dressing and processing game meat. More information can be found at this website: [More CWD Information](#)

A practical CWD video designed for hunters who want to learn and see more can be found here: [CWD video](#)

Q6. Why should people be concerned about CWD?

A6. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) poses a significant threat to the future health and vitality of captive and free-ranging mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk and moose populations throughout twenty-six states and provinces in North America. A growing body of evidence suggests that unchecked CWD epidemics can impair the long-term performance of affected populations. The disease shortens the lifespan of infected animals. As a larger proportion of the population becomes infected, older age classes suffer high rates of mortality, and the average age declines. If CWD infection rates are high enough, the population may not be able to sustain itself.

CWD poses serious problems for wildlife management, and the implications for free-ranging deer and elk are significant. Recent studies have shown local declines in deer abundance associated with CWD epidemics, and computer modeling suggests that CWD could substantially reduce deer, elk or moose populations by lowering adult survival rates. Where it occurs, CWD may alter the management of wild deer, elk and moose populations. For example, management recommendations in other states have sharply reduced the density of deer in areas with high CWD infection rates to slow the spread of the disease.

Q7. Why do we want to prevent CWD prevalence rates from increasing in Colorado?

A7. As CWD prevalence rates increase within a specific herd, the likelihood of animals in that herd becoming infected also increases. Older animals have a higher potential for exposure to CWD — particularly for mule deer bucks — and as more of them die from the disease relative to younger animals, the average age of the herd decreases. A proportion of younger animals will also become infected and die at an early age. Animals will begin to die from the disease two years after infection. Considering this information, it is best to prevent high prevalence rates from occurring in a herd. If CWD prevalence is already high, removing older bucks to decrease the sex ratio and achieve a younger age structure before the disease affects the entire herd is a preferred strategy to reduce prevalence.

Q8. What is Colorado doing to manage CWD?

A8. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is currently reassessing when management actions should be taken to control CWD in Colorado's deer, elk and moose herds. Since it is unlikely that CWD can be eradicated, the overall goal is to prevent CWD from increasing in prevalence or spreading. The primary management approach will use hunter harvest because public hunters are CPW's best tool to remove infected animals and prevent the spread of CWD. Management actions have previously been taken to reduce CWD prevalence, and the effectiveness has varied.

MANDATORY CWD TESTING

Q9. Why is CPW implementing a mandatory CWD test in 2017? What is the objective?

A9. Voluntary submissions of hunter-harvested deer, elk and moose for CWD testing have been low and limit CPW's ability to determine infection rates of CWD. As a result, CPW will resume mandatory harvest submissions of mule deer from select Game Management Units in 2017 to increase the number of samples submitted for testing. The objective is to improve CPW's knowledge of CWD infection rates, which may influence harvest management as well as herd management decisions.

Mandatory CWD testing has been authorized under the CPW Director's authority in accordance with CPW regulation [Chapter W-02.209.F](#). Mandatory testing occurs periodically in select units, whereas voluntary submissions are accepted annually statewide.

Q10. Why is testing for CWD important?

A10. The proportion of animals in the population that are infected (prevalence rate) is needed to inform wildlife management. Our ability to understand prevalence rates relies on biological samples collected from a large number of animals in a herd.

Q11. What Game Management Units (GMUs) are included in the mandatory sampling effort? Are all hunters licensed for the selected GMUs required to participate in the mandatory sample?

A11. All rifle season buck hunters licensed for Game Management Units (GMUs) 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 33, 61, 62, 64, 65, 131, 191, 211 and 231 who harvest a buck are required to submit their deer head or have a CWD sample taken. In addition, all deer hunters in GMU 33 who harvest a deer of either sex are required to submit their deer head or have a CWD sample taken.

Q12. Why were some GMUs selected for mandatory CWD testing and not others?

A12. CPW has limited funds to pay for statewide CWD testing, which is why only select GMU were chosen for sampling in 2017.

Q13. Why will the mandatory sampling effort focus on bucks and not does?

A13. There are many reasons why the mandatory testing predominantly includes bucks instead of does. Not all GMUs in the state have doe harvest, whereas all units do have buck harvest. Because of this, there is much higher and more consistent buck harvest statewide, which better supports the assessment of long term trends in prevalence. Also, prevalence rates are generally higher in bucks, so there is a greater chance to find CWD in a herd if resources are focused on testing only bucks. Based on this knowledge, CPW will only be testing bucks in the 2017 mandatory sample with one exception: GMU 33 is the only unit where all buck and doe hunters were selected for the mandatory sample.

Q14. Is it true that CWD is more common in bucks than does?

A14. In Colorado, yes. CWD studies have shown that prevalence rates for adult bucks are approximately double the prevalence rates found for the adult does of the same population. In addition, older bucks are more likely to have CWD than younger bucks. Thus, a commonly recommended management practice for reducing CWD prevalence rate is to reduce the buck:doe ratio and the average age of bucks.

Q15. Why isn't CPW including elk or moose in the mandatory CWD testing?

A15. Infection rates are higher in deer than in elk and moose; therefore, the initial focus is on deer. CWD is more likely to cause a population impact in deer because prevalence is generally higher than in elk and moose, making testing a higher priority for deer than for elk and moose.

Q16. How and when will hunters be informed that they are selected for mandatory CWD testing?

A16. Hunters that are selected for mandatory CWD testing will receive a CPW notification letter by mail in August of 2017. CPW strongly encourages hunters to update their contact information registered with the state at: cpw.state.co.us/UpdateInfo

Q17. What does it mean if I receive a letter from CPW notifying me I was selected for mandatory CWD testing?

A17. Anyone who is selected for mandatory CWD testing is required to bring the requested sample (head) of their harvested deer to a CPW Area or Regional Wildlife Office for testing. A list of office locations can be found [here](#). According to CPW regulation Chapter W-02.209.F, it is unlawful to fail to submit CWD samples if you are selected for mandatory CWD testing.

Q18. I was selected for mandatory CWD testing. Where do I need to bring my sample? What part of my deer do I need to bring? What else do I need to bring with me?

A18. You should take the deer head to a CPW Area or Regional Wildlife Office submission site. Specific locations and operating hours of the submission sites can be found here: cpw.state.co.us/CWD-Test

What to bring to the CPW submission site:

- 1. Hunting License.** You must bring your hunting license so CPW can obtain the information on your license. If someone else submits your deer head, they must bring a copy of your hunting license or Customer Identification (CID) number, but the carcass tag that came with your license should remain with the carcass.
- 2. Location of Harvest (GPS coordinates or map location).** You will be asked for the GMU, date of harvest and the geographic coordinates (Lat/Long or UTM) of where you harvested your deer. If coordinates are not available, you will be asked to show where the deer was harvested on a map at the submission site.
- 3. CWD Sample.** Please bring only the head of your deer to the submission site as soon as possible, preferably within 5 days of harvest. When removing the head, leave 2 to 4 inches of the neck below the lower jawbone and base of the skull. Whole brains or pieces of brain are not accepted for testing. Please wrap the exposed area with cheese cloth or similar material to prevent tissues from falling out of the skull. Keep the head cool, dry, and avoid freezing if possible.

Antlers and capes from harvested deer may be removed by hunters before submitting heads for sampling. CPW will not remove antlers or capes for hunters. CPW suggests that hunters planning shoulder-mount taxidermy should take their animal to the taxidermist before submitting the head for CWD testing. Hunters planning European-mount taxidermy should bring the head to the CPW submission site before the taxidermist and plan to leave the head until a sample can be taken. You may have to wait up to a day to get your head back. Hunters planning taxidermy or mounting should notify CPW personnel at the submission site.

Q19. How soon after harvest do I need to submit my CWD sample for testing?

A19. It is recommended that the head of the harvested animal is submitted for testing as soon as possible. We highly recommend bringing the head to a CPW Area or Regional Wildlife Office submission site within 5 days of harvest. If possible, keep the head cool, dry, and prevent it from freezing until you are able to submit the sample.

Q20. Does the mandatory CWD test cost the hunter anything?

A20. No. Hunters selected for mandatory CWD testing will not have to pay for the test.

Q21. If I was not selected for mandatory CWD testing, do I need to pay to test my animal for CWD?

A21. Yes. The service is still available for hunters that wish to test their animal for CWD. Hunters not selected at random for free mandatory CWD testing and wish to have their animal tested will have to pay the subsidized rate of \$25.00 for the test. The cost of processing and testing each sample for CWD is approximately \$75.00, but CPW is only charging hunters \$25.00 to test their animal.

Q22. If I was not selected for mandatory CWD testing, can I volunteer my deer for the sake of science?

A22. Yes, you can, but if you were not selected to receive a free CWD test as part of the mandatory sample, you will need to pay \$25.00 for CWD testing. If you submit your deer head for CWD testing, you will be able to access your CWD test results from the CPW website.

Q23. Can I take and submit my own CWD tissue sample?

A23. The collection of the correct tissues for CWD testing requires special training. CPW recommends bringing your deer head to a submission site or to a licensed veterinarian trained to collect the tissue samples needed for testing. If a veterinarian is used, you still need to bring the sample to a CPW submission site.

Q24. How long will it take to receive the test results?

A24. Test results will take a minimum of two weeks and on average three weeks before they are available. During late seasons and times of high volume sample collection, CPW anticipates that test results may take longer than three weeks.

Q25. What should I do with the meat while waiting for the CWD test results to come back?

A25. Hunters should process their deer as they normally would while waiting for the CWD test results. If using commercial processing, request that your carcass is processed and packaged separately. Marking packaged meat to clearly identify what animal it represents will aid in distinguishing meat from a CWD-positive animal if the test results are positive.

Q26. What happens if my deer is CWD positive? Am I eligible for a new tag or a refund?

A26. CPW recommends that hunters not eat the meat or tissues of an animal that tests positive for CWD. Refunds or antlerless licenses may be issued in any unit approved by CPW for the same species in the same year to hunters who harvest a deer, elk or moose in which CWD is detected through CPW's CWD monitoring or testing programs. Please see CPW regulations in Chapter W-16 Article 4 for detailed information regarding refunds and reissued license eligibility resulting from CWD positive test results.

Q27. What are the chances that my deer has CWD?

A27. CPW suggests looking at a recent CWD prevalence map to learn what the infection rate was estimated to be for the area of the state where you hunted your deer. Maps for **deer** and **elk** can be found **here**. Higher prevalence means that there is a higher chance your harvested deer is infected with CWD. For example, <1% prevalence means that fewer than one in 100 animals submitted for testing from that area has tested CWD-positive. In contrast, 5-10% prevalence means that one out of every 10 to 20 animals submitted has tested positive. Generally speaking, older deer are more likely to have CWD than younger deer, and adult bucks are more likely to have CWD than adult does. The information collected from the 2017 mandatory sample and voluntary submissions will allow CPW to update this prevalence map and provide you and your fellow hunters with more current information about CWD in Colorado's deer herds.

Q28. If my deer has CWD, what do I do with the meat and carcass?

A28. In the case that a harvested deer tests positive for CWD, the hunter should carefully discard the animal. CPW recommends that all parts of a CWD infected animal, including processed meat, be contained in two heavy duty plastic garbage bags and put out with the weekly trash or brought to the local landfill. Each plastic garbage bag should be independently tied.

CPW will accept donations of unprocessed or processed meat that is infected with CWD for research purposes at the CWD submission sites in Fort Collins, Denver and Craig. Processed meat must not contain spices of any kind to be eligible for a donation.

Q29. How will I learn about the test results?

A29. As soon as results are known, they will be available on the CPW website (cpw.state.co.us/CWD-Test). Remember to save your CWD head tag number, which is needed to look up your results.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (CWD)

Q30. Where can I learn more about CWD?

A30. We suggest visiting the following websites:

CPW's CWD webpage: cpw.state.co.us/CWD

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment website: www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/prion-diseases

CWD Alliance webpage: cwd-info.org