

# Abdominal



- Abdominal worms live in the abdomen of Colorado deer. These worms do not cause disease and are not a concern for human health.

## Species Affected in Colorado

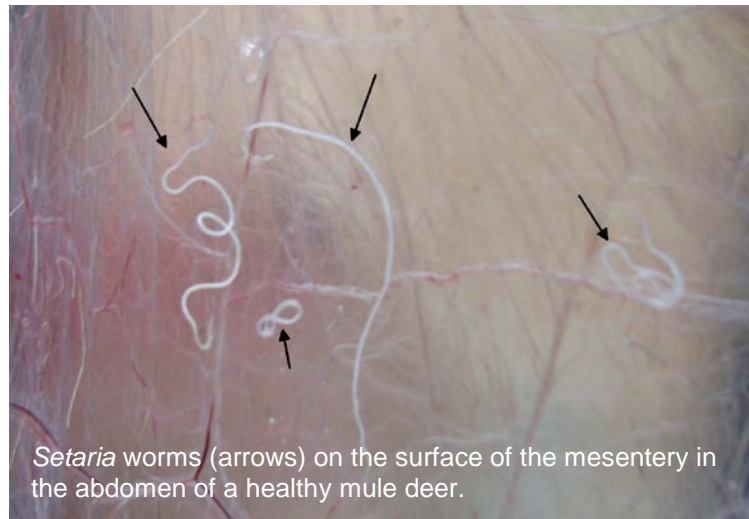
- Mule deer, white-tailed deer
- Rarely elk, moose, bighorn sheep

## What to Look For

- Thin, slender worms, often curled up on the surfaces of organs, in the abdomen of deer.
- Mineralized (dead) worms in the abdomen of deer.

## Cause and Transmission

The deer abdominal worm is a nematode (roundworm) in the genus *Setaria*. Adult *Setaria* are frequently seen by deer hunters while field dressing animals. The worms are seen on the surfaces of the abdominal organs (see photo). Worms are approximately 5-10 inches long with a whitish to clear color, tapered ends, and bodies that are often curled. Infections are more common in fawns and yearling deer than in adults. The number of worms in the abdomen rarely exceeds about 30, with higher numbers suggesting the deer may have been in poor condition or poor health. Transmission of worms is through mosquitoes that pick up microfilariae (immature worms) while feeding on infected deer and pass the infection to other animals. The deer abdominal worm does not cause significant disease in deer, with severe cases resulting in only minor irritation in the abdomen. This parasite does not infect humans or non-ruminant animals.



*Setaria* worms (arrows) on the surface of the mesentery in the abdomen of a healthy mule deer.

## Public Health Considerations

Deer abdominal worms do not pose a threat to human health and the presence of these worms is considered a normal finding. Hunters are reminded that parasites are a normal finding in all wild game and that proper cooking of meat is always recommended. Although small numbers of abdominal worms are not a concern, in rare cases of severe infections (>30 worms, especially in adults) this may indicate an underlying problem with the health of the animal. CPW recommends that any sick animals should not be consumed.

### Additional Information/References:

Mule and black-tailed deer of North America (edited by Olof C. Wallmo). "Diseases" chapter written by Charles P. Hibler. 1981.

Rev 11/2016