

Fibromas in Deer



- Deer fibromas are wart-like tumors of deer skin that are caused by a virus.

Species Affected in Colorado

- Mule deer
- White-tailed deer
- Occasionally elk and moose

What to Look For

- Nodular, usually dark-colored, hairless growths on the skin
- Often abraded or ulcerated (i.e. bleeding surface)
- Typically located on face, neck, and forelegs, but can occur anywhere
- Vary in size from pinpoint to several inches in diameter
- Large growths may hang from the skin
- May occur in clumps on the skin



Deer with fibroma hanging from chest (left) and clustered around eyelid (right).

Cause and Transmission

Deer fibromas are caused by the deer papillomavirus. Like many other papillomaviruses, this virus causes wart-like growths (in deer these are usually classified as fibromas) on the skin. Deer fibromas can last for weeks to months and can get quite large, but most will eventually regress and heal completely without treatment. Once the growths are healed, the deer has lifelong resistant to future infections by this virus. Young deer are more commonly affected than older deer. The virus may be transmitted by many ways including direct skin-to-skin contact, scratching against the same scratching posts, or possibly even biting insects. In most cases, the growths do not interfere with normal deer behavior, although very large growths can interfere with limb movement and growths around the eyes can obstruct vision.

Public Health Considerations

Deer fibromas are not a concern for public health. The deer papillomavirus is only known to affect deer and closely related species. The virus does not affect people, and meat from an affected deer is safe for consumption. There is also no known risk for transmission of the virus to cattle or other domestic livestock.

Additional Information/References:

Papillomavirus Infections, in *Infectious Diseases of Wild Mammals* (Authors: John P. Sundberg, Marc Van Ranst, and A. Bennett Jensen)

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