

Chronic wasting disease: What hunters need to know



Example of an animal afflicted with chronic wasting disease
Photo courtesy of Wyoming Game and Fish

What is chronic wasting disease?

- Prion diseases—or transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs)—are a family of rare progressive neurodegenerative disorders that affect both humans and animals.¹ Examples of prion diseases include:²
 - Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or “mad cow disease” in cattle
 - Scrapie in sheep and goats
 - Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) in humans³
 - Chronic wasting disease in wild and domesticated deer, elk, and moose
- Chronic wasting disease (CWD) attacks the nervous system of deer, elk, and moose.^{2,4} It can take up to a year for the animal to develop symptoms.⁴ Symptoms of CWD include:
 - Wasting (weight loss)
 - Stumbling
 - Listlessness (having little or no interest in anything)
 - Other neurologic symptoms
 - Death

CWD in Utah

- CWD has been detected in mule deer and elk each year since 2002.²
- CWD has been found in 3 different geographic areas (see map to the right).^{2,4}
- As of September 2, 2025, 356 mule deer and 10 elk have tested positive for CWD.²

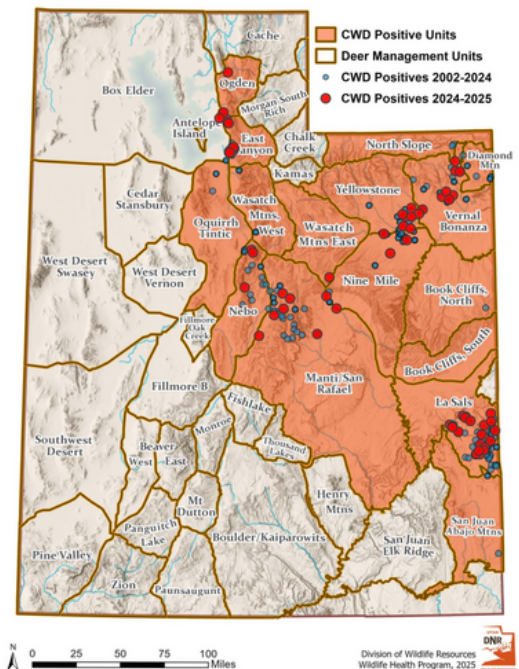
Can humans get CWD?

- There have been no reported cases of CWD infection in people to date.⁴
- However, some studies suggest CWD poses a risk to certain types of non-human primates that eat meat from CWD-infected animals or come in contact with brain or body fluids from infected deer or elk.⁴ These studies raise concerns that there may also be a risk to people.
- Since 1997, the World Health Organization has recommended keeping the agents of all known prion diseases from entering the human food chain.⁴

How hunters can protect themselves

- Hunters should not harvest animals that appear sick or eat meat from animals that appear sick. If you see a deer or elk that looks sick or emaciated, immediately report it to a Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) office.²
- If you have harvested a deer or elk in a CWD-positive hunting unit, contact UDWR to coordinate CWD testing. If you did not harvest your deer or elk in a CWD-positive unit but would still like to have it tested for a \$25 fee, contact the Utah Veterinary Diagnostic Lab in Logan or Spanish Fork.
- The DWR advises hunters to take the following precautions with game carcasses:
 - Do not handle wild game that appear sick. Instead, contact your local DWR office and notify them of the location of the sick animal.²
 - Do not eat meat from animals known or suspected to be infected with CWD.²
 - Wear rubber or latex gloves when field dressing big game.²
 - When you harvest wild game, bone out the meat and avoid consuming the brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, and lymph nodes.²
 - Minimize handling of soft tissues and fluids. Wash your hands with soap and warm water after you handle any part of the carcass.²
 - Knives, saws, and cutting table surfaces should be disinfected with a solution of 50% household bleach for at least 1 hour after use.²

Utah CWD surveillance 2002–2025



CWD Surveillance from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, April 22). *About prion diseases*. <https://www.cdc.gov/prions/about/index.html>
2. Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. (2024, October 10). *Chronic wasting disease*. wildlife.utah.gov/chronic-wasting-disease.html
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 13). *Classic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease*. <https://www.cdc.gov/creutzfeldt-jakob/about/index.html>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, April 17). *About chronic wasting disease (CWD)*. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-wasting/about/index.html>

Scan the QR codes for more information



Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
website on CWD and tracking efforts



CDC website on CWD