



Preventing Chronic Wasting Disease

OCT 2013

ANIMAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Animal Health Unit

The Animal Health Unit is responsible for health monitoring and diagnosis of disease in both wildlife and domestic animals. The staff provide expertise in laboratory services and in veterinary medicine to support public health and animal welfare.

The Animal Health Unit and Laboratory are located in the Department of Environment at 10 Burns Road, Whitehorse, Yukon.

Contact

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Government of Yukon

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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 potentially caribou).

There is no cure for CWD and control efforts have been ineffective when this disease has occurred in the wild.

CWD has not been found in Yukon. A new regulation will help prevent it from being brought in by hunters who harvest these species in areas where CWD may occur.

Northern B.C. and N.W.T. are exempt from this new regulation because these areas are considered to be at low risk of having CWD at this time.



Don't risk bringing CWD back home if you hunt outside 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 outside Yukon, only bring meat that has been separated from the head and spinal column into 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 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 Yukon with portions of a cervid 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 prevent this disease from affecting key subsistence species in Yukon.

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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 Saskatchewan and Alberta, as well as numerous US states. There is no treatment or vaccine for CWD and it would be devastating for it to spread to animals such as moose or caribou in Yukon.

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 would have long-term environmental impacts. While it may be spread by natural migration of wild deer, it is prudent to avoid bringing potentially infective body tissues into Yukon from other jurisdictions.

Clinical signs and human health

It takes years for CWD infected animals to develop the signs of disease and they may appear normal even though they are infected. Ultimately they show weight loss, listlessness, depression, weakness, behavioral changes and eventually death.

CWD has not been identified as a human health risk. It is recommended that meat from affected animals should not be eaten because CWD is very similar to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) that caused infection in people.

Testing cervids harvested in Yukon

Environment Yukon tests the brain and other tissues of harvested cervids for CWD. We encourage you to contact a Conservation Officer or the Animal Health Laboratory (867-667-5285) to submit the head of any deer, elk, moose or caribou that you harvest in Yukon for testing. The samples can be taken by the laboratory staff and the head returned to you if you want it returned. It is important to continue to monitor Yukon cervids to be sure CWD is not present here.



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