

DFG Announces New Regulation to Avoid Spread of Fatal Deer Disease
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California hunters who plan to hunt deer and elk out-of-state must follow strict new guidelines to minimize the chance of spreading Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) to California elk and deer herds.

Unlike the emergency regulation adopted last year, the new permanent regulation, adopted by the Fish and Game Commission in April, will not allow whole carcasses and heads to be brought into California. Only the following body parts will be allowed:

boned-out meat and commercially processed cuts of meat
portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached
hides with no heads attached
clean skull plates (no meat or tissue attached) with antlers attached
antlers with no meat or tissue attached
finished taxidermy heads
upper canine teeth (buglers, whistlers, ivories)

Although much has been learned about CWD, it is unknown how it is transmitted from one animal to another. Since the disease agent is present in nervous tissue, not allowing brain or spinal cord tissue to be brought into the state will minimize the risk of introducing CWD. Other states have either adopted similar regulations or are strongly recommending similar procedures to their hunters.

CWD is a neurological disease that is fatal to deer and elk. It has been found in wild deer and elk in limited areas of Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. CWD has also been identified in farmed elk in Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Disease experts believe CWD is passed through direct animal-to-animal contact and possibly by indirect contact with the highly resistant CWD prion, the suspected disease agent, in a contaminated environment.

CWD has not been found in California deer and elk. California is considered a "low risk" state because of its long-term ban on the importation of live elk, prohibition on elk farming, and its strict monitoring of live deer importations. Nevertheless, the DFG has been conducting a CWD surveillance

program since 1999 and will continue to monitor wild deer populations.

Currently, there is no evidence that CWD is naturally transmissible to humans or to animals other than deer and elk. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta states that "although it is generally prudent to avoid consuming food derived from any animal with evidence with CWD, to date, there is no evidence that CWD has been transmitted or can be transmitted to humans under natural conditions." It is suggested that hunters follow simple precautions when hunting:

Wear rubber gloves when field dressing carcasses;
Bone out meat from the animal;
Minimize the handling of brain and spinal cord, eyes, spleen and lymph nodes and avoid consuming these tissues;
Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed.

CWD is related to mad cow disease and to scrapie, which affects sheep. Ongoing studies suggest that CWD is unlikely to naturally infect species other than deer or elk.

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