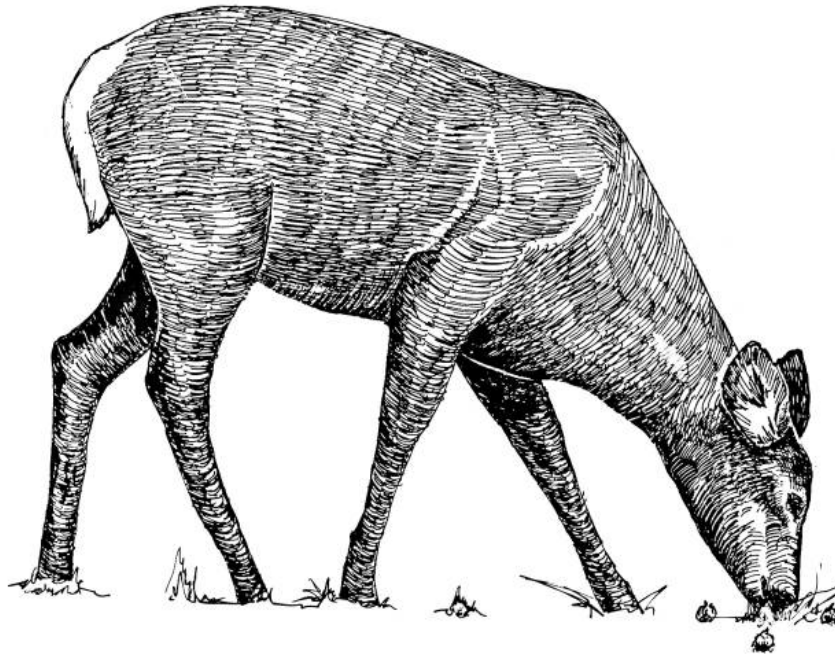


The Delaware Response Plan for Chronic Wasting Disease



**Delaware Department of Natural Resources
and Environmental Control**

Division of Fish and Wildlife

Updated April 2026



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Introduction

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a neurodegenerative disease that affects members of the family Cervidae: white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), sika deer (*Cervus nippon*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), elk (*Cervus elaphus*) and moose (*Alces alces*). CWD is related to other transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs), including scrapie in sheep, mad cow disease in cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob (CJD) disease in humans. In some instances, CWD can contribute to population-level declines in affected species, leading to the potential for environmental and economic impacts.

Unlike mad cow disease and variant CJD, there is no evidence to date that humans can contract CWD from eating venison. However, relatively little is known about CWD and as a result, researchers and public officials err on the side of caution when dealing with the disease and public safety (Appendix I). In the future, ongoing research will provide further insight into the wildlife and human health implications of CWD. Until then, we remain vigilant to ensure local deer populations are well-monitored and plans are in place to manage the disease.

Since 2003, the DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife has conducted annual CWD surveillance, with random sampling of hunter-harvested deer statewide.

The Division tests at least 600 random samples across the state each year. There is a 99% chance of detecting the disease if it exists in more than 1% of the harvested deer population. Over the past 23 years, we have tested 12,938 samples.

In addition to random sampling of harvested deer, the Division monitors any sick animals exhibiting CWD-associated symptoms. Any illegally imported live cervid (exotic or native) is euthanized and tested.

Purpose

Delaware's CWD Response Plan outlines the DFW management activities that address the disease's presence, determine the magnitude and

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geographic extent of infection and aim to eliminate or manage its transmission. If CWD is detected in a surrounding state within 25 miles of Delaware's border and there is no significant geographic barrier that would prevent deer from entering this state, the plan outlines the surveillance strategy to increase monitoring efforts in Delaware near the out-of-state detection point.

This response plan will be carried out using an adaptive management approach and will be revised as needed as new information becomes available, both within Delaware and surrounding states and with general knowledge and understanding of CWD.

Agency Roles

Supervising Agency for wild white-tailed deer and sika: DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife (DNREC-DFW)

Supervising Agency for captive cervid species: Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA)

Supporting Agencies

Delaware Health and Social Services (DHSS)

Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System (PADLS)

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service
Wildlife Services (USDA-WS)

Responsibilities

Both the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), through its Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) have defined responsibilities before and after the detection of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Delaware.

Prior to detection, DNREC-DFW responsibilities include regulatory oversight of white-tailed deer and free-range and sika deer movement, surveillance and testing of the wild deer population, and implementation of measures to reduce the risk of CWD introduction into the state. Following

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detection, DNREC-DFW is responsible for determining the geographic extent and prevalence of CWD within the wild deer herd and initiating management actions aimed at limiting disease spread to new areas.

The DDA is responsible for oversight of captive cervid facilities. In the event of a CWD detection, DDA responsibilities include implementation of quarantines, coordination of depopulation efforts for affected captive herds when necessary, diagnostic testing of exposed animals, and conducting trace investigations to identify potential sources of infection and movements of exposed animals.

A coordinated, collaborative approach between DNREC-DFW and DDA is essential at both the administrative and field levels to ensure an effective and timely response. To facilitate this coordination, an interagency response structure has been established to support communication, decision-making, and implementation of CWD management actions across agencies.

General Response

While CWD has potentially serious consequences, there is currently no evidence that it can be transmitted to humans or domestic animals. Consequently, it is important that the response to a CWD outbreak be proportionate to the health risks and economic impact the disease imposes.

1. Upon receiving laboratory notification of the first CWD-positive sample from within Delaware, DFW will advise the DNREC Secretary that a preliminary positive case of CWD has been detected and that backup samples are being tested for confirmation at the United States Department of Agriculture National Veterinary Services Laboratory (USDA NVSL). Confirmation may take more than a week from the preliminary positive CWD notification. If the positive case is not confirmed, the Secretary's office will be notified, and no further action will be required. If backup samples for confirmatory testing are not available, the case will be considered a true positive.

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2. If the positive case is confirmed, USDA NVSL followed by DFW will notify the appropriate and predetermined intradepartmental contacts within DNREC: the Office of the Secretary, the Office of Communications (OComms), the DFW Regional Habitat Manager where the disease was detected, the DFW Wildlife Damage Biologist, Delaware Natural Resource Police and the Delaware Department of Justice.
3. Concurrently, DFW will notify the relevant personnel within the Delaware Department of Agriculture, including the Office of the State Veterinarian, as well as the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services and USDA APHIS Wildlife Services.
4. Concurrently, the DFW Director and designees will notify surrounding mid-Atlantic states and attempt to notify key constituency/stakeholder groups, including legislators and local community officials, in the area where the CWD-positive case was found, informing them that CWD has been identified in Delaware and making them aware of the impending public announcement.
5. An epidemiological investigation will be conducted to determine the origin of the index case of CWD.
6. Within 24-48 hours of final USDA confirmation, the DNREC OComms will issue a news release about the positive CWD case. The news release may include background information on CWD, a synopsis of Delaware's CWD surveillance efforts, an outline of likely CWD response management actions and other CWD-related materials deemed necessary or appropriate given the particular facts at the time.
7. A CWD response management team will be assembled under the direction of the DFW to include the contacts and agencies listed in items three and four above, and outside experts as needed. DNREC personnel will include the DFW Director or designee(s), the DFW Wildlife Section Administrator, the DFW Game Species and Wildlife Damage Program Manager, the DFW Deer Biologist, the Department of Agriculture's state veterinarian, a Delaware Natural Resource Police representative, the appropriate DFW Regional Habitat Manager and the DNREC OComms spokesperson. This team will also determine the research and data

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required to effectively manage the outbreak. Research and data-collection work may be contracted out as appropriate.

8. A limited number of DNREC staff members (including a DFW designee(s) and a spokesperson with OComms) will be assigned as CWD media contacts. All CWD-related questions from the public and the media, including public appearances and interviews, will be routed to this team.
9. Legislation and/or emergency regulations may be enacted to implement appropriate disease surveillance and containment measures. These measures may include, but are not limited to, expanding deer seasons and increasing bag limits; increasing the allocation of deer management permits; mandating deer check-in at designated DFW disease surveillance wildlife health check stations within the CWD Management Zone; issuing special permits for the harvest of deer by licensed hunters in areas prescribed by the DFW; prohibiting deer rehabilitation; prohibiting deer feeding or baiting; restricting carcass transport; implementing necessary depopulation of captive cervids; fence security; and quarantine of captive cervid facilities.
10. Within one-month of detection, a CWD community meeting, including a question-and-answer session, will be held near the CWD index case.

Response for Detection in Free-Ranging Deer

The primary objective of the initial CWD response efforts will be to determine the prevalence and geographic extent of CWD infection in the free-ranging deer population. If a CWD-infected free-ranging deer is identified, the following management actions will be implemented as rapidly as possible:

1. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) will be used to pinpoint the exact location of the index case. A 5-mile-radius circle (79 square miles) will be drawn around the index case. A CWD Management Zone (CMZ) will be delineated as a noncircular area to contain a minimum of 79-square-miles within Delaware, using county- and/or state-maintained roads or other geographic features, such as Delaware's Wildlife Management Zones.

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2. As soon as practical, preferably within 21 days of a confirmed CWD detection in Delaware, DFW staff will begin collecting samples from free-ranging deer within the CMZ using various methods (e.g., road-killed deer, antlerless deer damage permits, clustered sampling, and/or recreational hunting, depending on the time of year). Trained DFW staff will conduct cluster sampling of deer within the CMZ, but as close to known harvest locations of deer that have tested positive for CWD, preferably within 1-mile of such locations, and cooperation from contractors, such as USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, will be sought if needed. Deer will be taken both day and night. Nighttime sampling will be conducted with the aid of handheld Forward Looking Infrared units and/or night vision. Suppressed firearms will be used where appropriate. As many deer as necessary and practical, will be sampled in the CMZ following statistical evaluation to determine the appropriate sample size to detect CWD at 1% apparent prevalence. Permission from landowners within the CMZ to remove and test deer on their property will be sought. All collection locations will be recorded using GIS, along with areas where access was prohibited.
3. If additional infected deer are detected in the CMZ, 5-mile radius boundaries will be extended around them, and sampling at the same rate will be conducted within the new areas. When no additional positive samples are detected that would extend the infection area, the resulting area encompassing the entire 5-mile radius CMZs will be considered the new CMZ.
4. During the first hunting season following the confirmed detection of CWD in Delaware, DFW will require mandatory deer check-in at wildlife health check stations in the CMZ, when open, for CWD testing. Depending on deer densities and the difficulty of obtaining samples, DFW may liberalize seasons and bag limits in the CMZ to encourage hunters to take more deer. Hunters will be notified of any positive test results as soon as feasible after a positive result. Hunters who do not wish to keep their carcass may donate it to DFW for potential distribution to the Delaware Hunters Against Hunger Program upon notification of a not detected CWD test result.

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Hunters who harvest deer within the CMZ will be required to forfeit the deer's head for testing if tissue samples cannot be collected onsite. For deer that will be mounted, the Division will develop a process to enable that and still provide an opportunity to collect samples. Trained DFW staff will collect the medial retropharyngeal lymph nodes (MRPLN) for testing at a USDA-approved laboratory. All unused tissues will be disposed of in accordance with State and EPA guidelines.

5. Targeted surveillance for CWD will be intensified within the CMZ and in adjacent areas.
6. Mandatory CWD testing will be implemented for all deer taken under the authorization of Scientific Collection Permits within the CMZ.
7. If captive deer facilities are present within the CMZ, DFW and Delaware Department of Agriculture personnel will inspect them as soon as possible after CWD is confirmed, and then every six months thereafter. Statewide, per current requirements, all captive deer that die will be tested for CWD. Facility operators will be required to check the integrity of perimeter fencing annually.
8. If no additional CWD-infected free-ranging deer are detected in the CMZ during the one-year period of mandatory CWD testing of deer:
 - a. Annual voluntary random CWD testing of hunter-killed deer will be conducted within the CMZ for four additional years. If the sample size for the fifth-year testing is inadequate (i.e., fewer than 300 carcasses), additional carcasses will be collected using various methods.
 - b. Heightened emphasis will continue on targeted surveillance for CWD in all Wildlife Management Zones adjacent to the CMZ. Non-hunter-harvested target deer, such as those killed by a motor vehicle, will be tested opportunistically as they become available.

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- c. The deer population within the CMZ will be considered CWD-free when no new CWD cases have been found for five consecutive years.
9. If additional CWD-infected free-ranging deer are found within or near the CMZ during the one-year period of mandatory CWD testing of all hunter-killed deer:
 - a. The CMZ will be extended as necessary to ensure a full 5-mile radius and/or a 79-square-mile area encompassing all CWD-positive cases identified within or near the CMZ.
 - b. Sampling will commence as described above in Section 2.
 - c. An adaptive management approach will be used to determine how long to maintain the extended seasons and bag limits within the CMZ.
10. If after 5 years the infection continues to spread beyond the CMZ, CWD management will most likely shift from an effort to eradicate the disease, to disease management and assessing distribution and prevalence.

Response for Detection in Captive Deer

As of April 2026, three individuals legally possess live cervids in Delaware (Figure 1). Currently, captive cervids are limited to white-tailed deer, fallow deer (*Dama dama*), red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), and sika deer (*Cervus nippon*). No additional permits for live cervid possession have been issued since September 2022. The conditions for possessing cervids have been enhanced. Boundary fences must be at least 10 feet high, and all captive cervids must be ear-tagged. All animals that die must be reported to the Office of the State Veterinarian at the Delaware Department of Agriculture for testing and submitted to an accredited veterinarian or an approved laboratory to determine cause of death. Additionally, live cervids may not be transported into Delaware.

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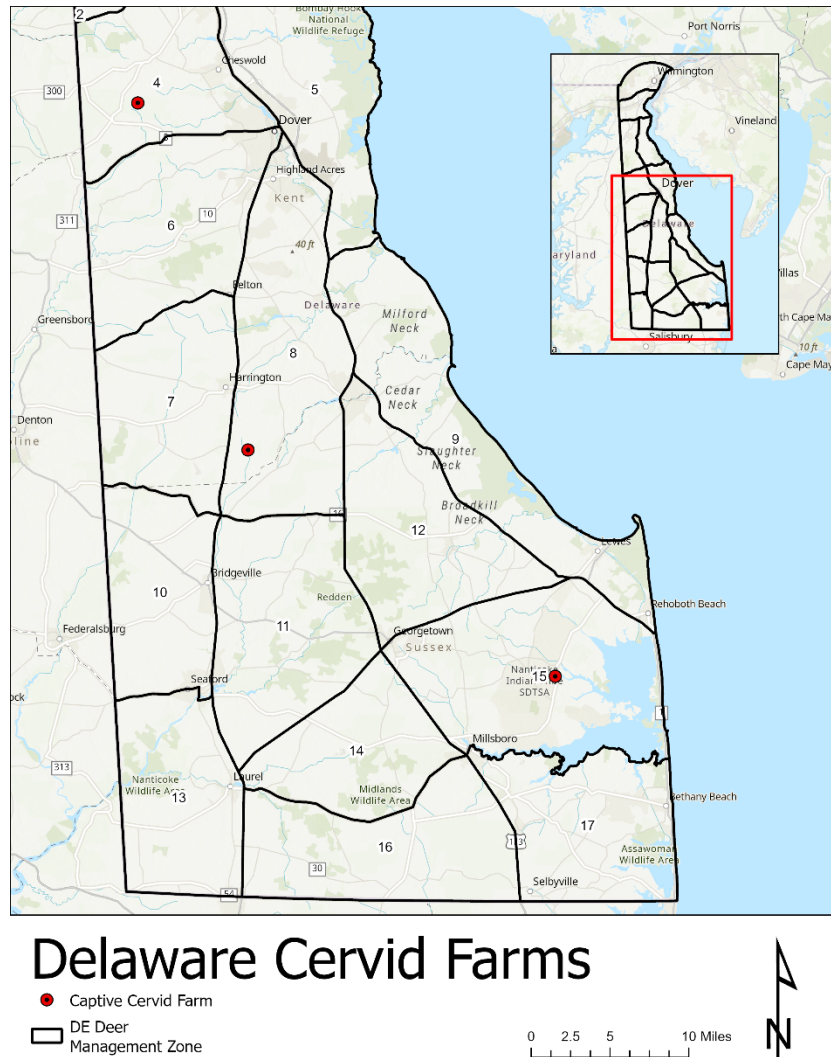


Figure 1. Captive Cervid Facilities in Delaware (2026), including Red Deer, Sika Deer and Fallow Deer.

Upon discovery of the disease in a captive herd, the primary objective of the initial CWD response will be to eradicate the disease from the herd and to determine whether it is also present in free-ranging deer surrounding the CWD-infected captive deer facility. If a CWD-infected captive deer is identified, the following measures will be implemented as rapidly as possible:

1. Under applicable statutory and regulatory authority provided by emergency regulations, depopulate all cervids at the facility where the infected deer was discovered and test all deer for CWD.

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2. Modify or augment the fence around the facility to exclude free-ranging native deer.
3. Decontaminate the facility to the extent possible in accordance with the USDA APHIS guidelines.
4. If the facility was legally permitted, revoke the owner's permit.
5. Attempt to trace back and forward any and all cervids in contact with CWD-infected animals to determine the origin and prevent further infection.
6. Implement the management actions described in **Response for Detection in Free-Ranging Deer** around the captive facility.

Response Involving a Detection in Close Proximity to the Delaware Border

1. Upon confirmation of an index case within 25 miles of the Delaware border and in the absence of a significant geographic barrier that would prevent deer from entering the state, DFW will notify appropriate parties using the means identified in Section A ("General Response") above.
2. Based on the information provided, surveillance may be enhanced along the border near the infection. The size and location of the area will be determined by geographic features and basic deer biology and will typically be 50–100 square miles.
3. Initially, if warranted, a minimum of 60 samples will be collected from the area to establish, with 95% confidence, that CWD prevalence is under 5% in the area.
4. Subsequent sampling intensity and management action will be determined based on results of sampling by the infected state and on sampling results within the Delaware border.
5. If the infected state detects additional positive animals near the border, the Delaware sampling area and intensity will be increased.

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6. If a CWD-positive case is detected during sampling in Delaware, Section B (Detection in Free-ranging Deer – Response) of this Plan will be activated.

Appendix I. Background Information

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease affecting cervid species, including deer, elk and moose, caused by infectious, misfolded prions. These prions misfold neighboring proteins to create holes that lead to neurological dysfunction and ultimately death by secondary causes (e.g., starvation, pneumonia, drowning).

Initially, in the 1960s, CWD was thought to be a nutritional malady in captive mule deer in Colorado. In 1978, CWD was identified as a TSE. As of the completion of this document, CWD has been found in 36 states and four Canadian provinces in North America (Figure 2).

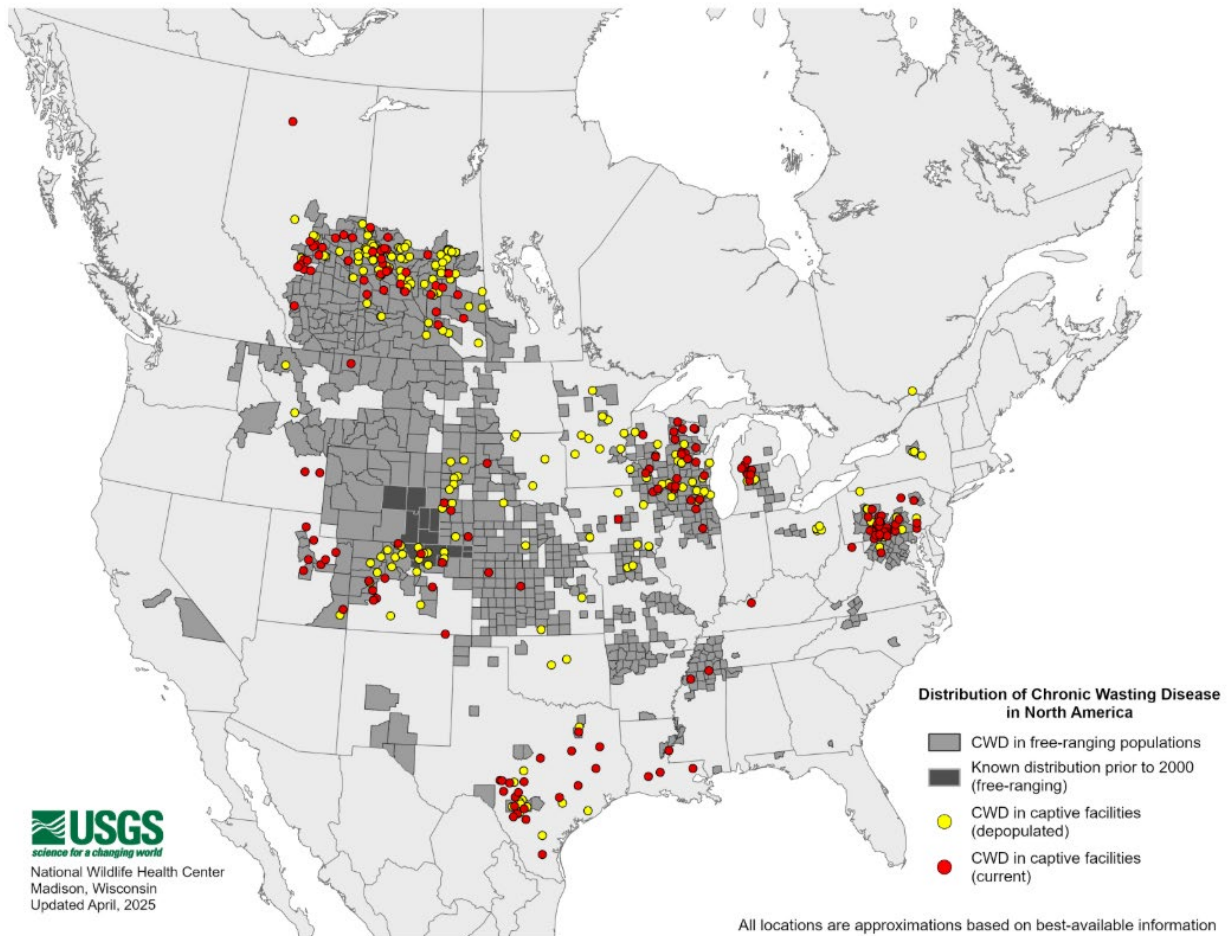


Figure 2. Map of CWD Positive Locations within North America, Image Credit: USGS

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CWD has been reported to occur in cervid species at least six months old. Scientists believe CWD prions are spread between animals through bodily fluids, including saliva, blood, urine and feces, which can occur through direct contact or indirectly through contamination of soil, food or water. CWD can also be transmitted from doe to fawn in utero or during birth and has been found in buck semen. Currently, no treatments or vaccines are available. All deer that contract CWD will get sick and die.

CWD belongs to the same family of prion diseases as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), commonly known as "mad cow" disease in cattle, scrapie in sheep and kuru and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in humans. Although there is no known transmission of CWD to humans, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends people who harvest deer – such as white-tailed, red, sika or mule deer – and elk or moose from areas where CWD has been confirmed test their animals for CWD before consuming the meat. While eating muscle meat from deer has not been shown to pose a risk to human health, out of an abundance of caution, deer meat should not be consumed if the animal tests positive for CWD.

Signs of CWD in Deer

CWD is believed to spread through direct contact among members of the Cervidae family – deer, elk, or moose – or indirectly through the environment. Because CWD has a long incubation period, deer may not show signs for over a year but can still transmit the disease to other deer. Since the signs of CWD overlap with those of other diseases affecting deer, CWD cannot be definitively diagnosed visually.

Signs of CWD typically appear as the animal approaches death and can include:

- Dramatic weight loss
- Poor coordination
- Drooping ears and head
- Excessive drooling
- Difficulty swallowing
- Frequent urination
- Loss of fear of humans

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- Reluctance to move, often standing with a widened stance
- Remaining in an area with water sources due to excessive thirst

Often, once signs of CWD appear, the infected deer dies from secondary causes such as predators, vehicle strikes or other diseases.

Who Do I Contact if I Suspect CWD in a Deer in Delaware?

To report sick or injured free-ranging deer, use DNREC's online [Sick and Injured Wildlife Reporting Form](#).

For captive farmed cervids, contact the Office of the State Veterinarian at the Delaware Department of Agriculture at 302-698-4500 or email DEanimalhealth@delaware.gov.