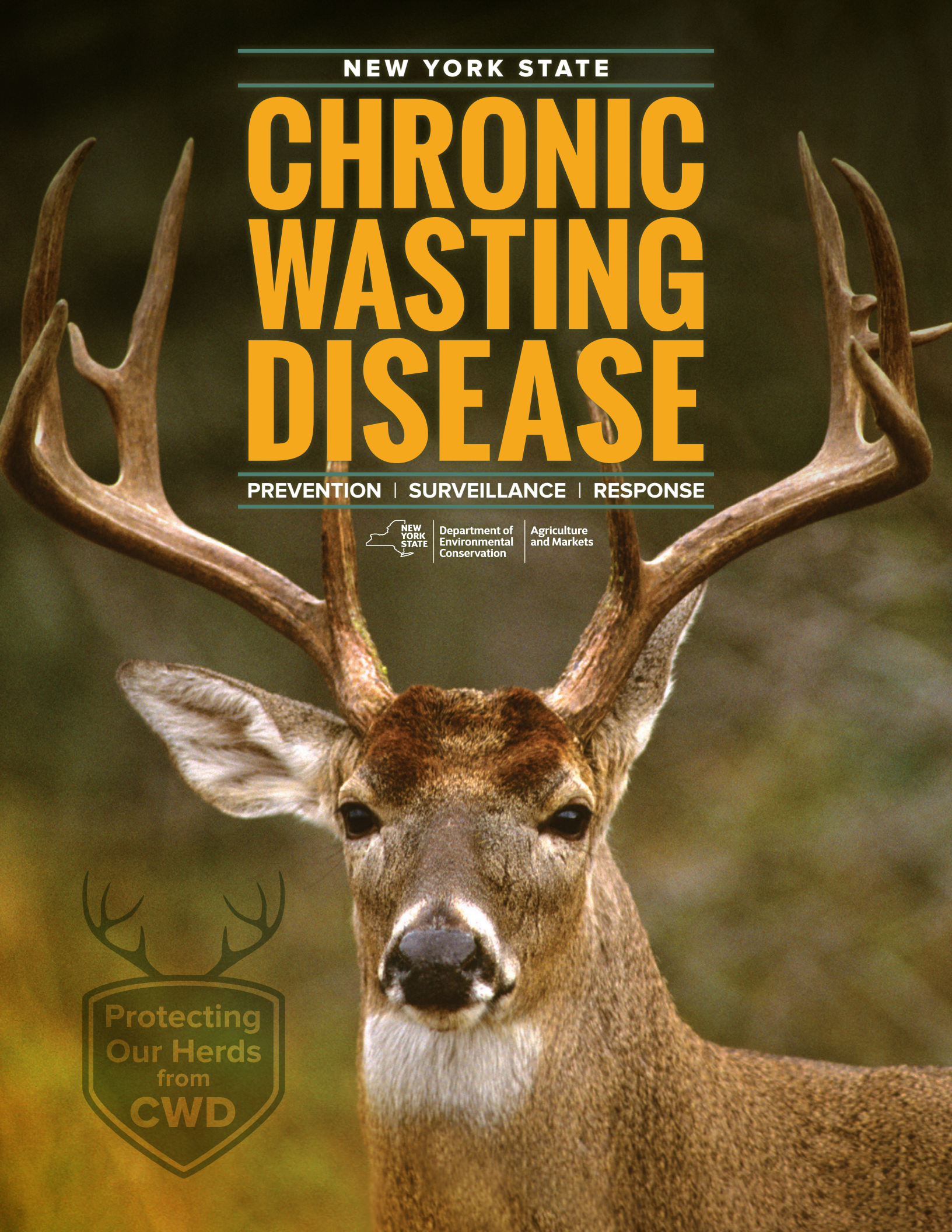
NEW YORK STATE

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

PREVENTION | SURVEILLANCE | RESPONSE



NEW YORK STATE | Department of Environmental Conservation | Agriculture and Markets

Protecting Our Herds from CWD

WHAT IS

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE?

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal disease of the cervid family (deer, elk, moose, and reindeer/caribou) caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. It is in the same family of diseases as bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("mad cow" disease) and scrapie in sheep. It was first discovered in Colorado in 1967 and has now been found in 26 states and three Canadian provinces.

What is at stake?

The discovery of CWD would have far-reaching and long-term implications for New Yorkers and our wildlife. Deer hunting in New York State represents a $1.5 billion-dollar economic value to communities and small businesses. DEC personnel and financial resources would be diverted away from other important wildlife and habitat conservation programs. Hunters and hunting-related businesses would have additional requirements to ensure the disease did not spread. Some people may choose not to hunt, which would compromise local deer population control, increase negative impacts to agriculture and forest habitats, and reduce benefits to local economies. Other people may choose not to eat venison, a sustainable food source. There would be negative impacts on important family traditions and cultural heritage. As CWD persists, many deer and moose would suffer, and populations would decline.

Can humans get CWD?

Although there are no known cases of CWD transmission from animals to humans, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that no one knowingly consume CWD-positive animals. In known CWD-positive areas, the CDC recommends that hunters strongly consider testing harvested deer before eating the meat. DEC recommends that no one consume meat from CWD-positive animals or any animal that appears to be sick or thin, or is acting sick.

Is CWD in New York State?

CWD was discovered in two captive deer facilities in New York in 2005 and subsequently in two wild white-tailed deer nearby. Intensive annual surveillance has not identified any additional cases in that area or in the rest of the state. Keeping CWD out of New York is a priority for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (DAM).

How is CWD spread?

The prions that cause CWD can be spread directly from animal-to-animal contact or indirectly from infected carcasses, parts, products, or contaminated environments. Prions are found throughout the body and in saliva, feces, and urine. They are shed by live animals before they appear sick. Humans can accidentally spread prions by moving live captive cervids, moving carcasses to new areas, or using natural urine products that contain prions. Prions bind to soil and plants. Animals that consume contaminated soil or plants can become infected. These “hotspots” can last for many years.

What do sick animals look like? Can I tell if a deer is infected?

Deer infected with CWD do not show visible signs for a year or more. At the end stages of the disease, they may appear emaciated (skinny, with hip and rib bones showing), have drooping ears, drool, walk in circles, or be unafraid of humans or pets. However, these signs are not exclusive to CWD, so the animal’s brain must be tested to confirm the presence of CWD. The public should report any sick or abnormal acting deer to the nearest DEC Wildlife office.

Can you get rid of CWD?

No. Prions are resistant to normal disinfection procedures that kill most disease agents like bacteria and viruses. They can remain infectious for many years. Once CWD is established in a wild population, it has been impossible to eliminate. The best approach is to keep infectious material out of the state.

NEW YORK STATE's THREE-PRONGED APPROACH TO COMBAT CWD

I. MINIMIZE THE RISK II. STRATEGIC SURVEILLANCE III. RAPID, EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

I. NEW YORK STATE INTERAGENCY CWD RISK MINIMIZATION PLAN

DEC, DAM, and the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Health Diagnostic Center developed a "New York State Interagency CWD Risk Minimization Plan" to keep CWD out of the state, to prevent CWD exposure to deer and moose, and to provide information to increase public understanding of CWD risks, as well as engage the pubic in CWD prevention measures.

Preventing Introduction from Outside New York

DEC has expanded the prohibition on the importation of whole carcasses and intact heads of hunter-harvested CWD-susceptible cervids (deer, elk, moose, and caribou) to all areas outside of New York. Only the deboned meat, cleaned skull cap, antlers with no flesh adhering, raw or processed cape or hide, cleaned teeth or lower jaw, and finished taxidermy products of CWD-susceptible animals may be brought into New York.

DAM also continues to prohibit the importation of live CWD-susceptible cervids into the state.

Reducing the Risk Posed by Use of Natural Deer Urine by Hunters

DEC will continue to assess the risk posed by the use of products composed of urine and excreted substances from CWD-susceptible cervids. Prions can be found in urine products, and there is currently no means to ensure a product is free of prions. Synthetic scent products are available as an alternative.

Prohibiting Deer Feeding

DEC regulations prohibit the public from feeding deer. This is to prevent negative ecological impacts and increased risks of disease transmission associated with artificial congregations of deer.

DEC and DAM Collaboration

DEC and DAM share regulatory responsibility for captive deer and elk. The agencies will take measures to enhance collaboration to prevent the importation or spread of CWD.

Communication and Outreach

DEC will enhance efforts to educate the public, hunters, policy makers, and people who like to see wild deer about the threats posed by CWD and to inform them about what they can do to keep CWD out of New York.

II. CWD STRATEGIC SURVEILLANCE

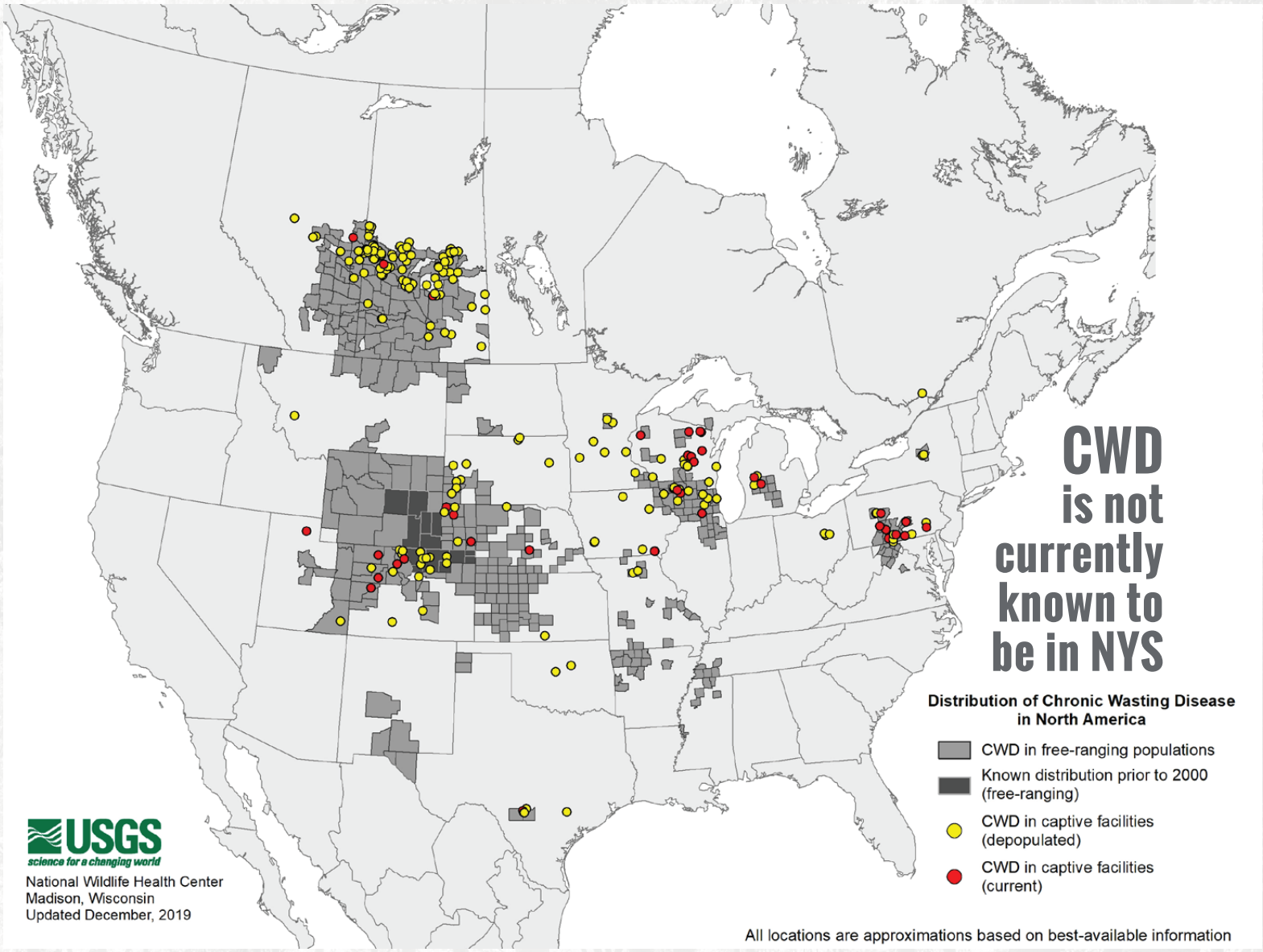
After the initial discovery of CWD in two wild deer in 2005, New York State has the distinction of being the only state to have not detected CWD again in wild deer. DEC and DAM are committed to keeping it that way. Early detection allows the best options for management, whether CWD is found in animals in the wild or behind a fence.

Using the Best Available Science

DEC uses the best available science to guide CWD surveillance. New York uses a weighted surveillance system that prioritizes samples from the highest risk animals in the highest-risk locations. This system streamlines workflow for field staff while increasing the probability of early detection. DEC has tested over 50,000 samples in the past 15 years. Since 2005, DAM has tested over 11,000 captive deer and captive elk on cervid farms. These animals represent between 6 and 10 percent of the entire captive cervid population in NYS.

Strong Partnerships Are Crucial

DEC partners with taxidermists and deer processors to help collect CWD samples each year. These businesses are essential to DEC's efforts and their assistance is appreciated. Public reporting of sick or abnormal-acting deer is critical to disease detection efforts.



III. NEW YORK STATE INTERAGENCY CWD RESPONSE PLAN

Aggressive action will be necessary should CWD be detected in New York. DEC, DAM, and the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Health Diagnostic Center developed the "New York State Interagency Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan 2015-2025" to identify the steps necessary to mount an initial response to the discovery of CWD.

Improved Agency Coordination

DEC and DAM are working together to identify and minimize disease threats to captive cervids and wildlife. Interstate import of live captive cervids was banned in 2013 because of the potential for CWD introduction. Since that time, CWD has been discovered in numerous additional captive herds in other states, so these preventative actions have clearly helped protect New York's wild deer and moose herds.

If CWD is Found in New York

If CWD is found in the wild, DEC will:

- Determine the scope of the outbreak by intensive removal and testing of wild deer
- Prevent disease movement by emergency regulations to prohibit movement of harvested deer and live captive cervids
- Engage local communities to support disease control efforts

If CWD is found in captive cervids:

- DAM will investigate and manage the infected herd and other exposed herds. Activities may include herd quarantine or depopulation.
- DEC will determine if the disease is present outside the fence by intensive removal and testing of wild deer.

CWD A CONTINUING THREAT

THE FACTS ABOUT

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE:

CWD is fatal to deer.

Once a deer is infected, it will die.

CWD negatively impacts deer and elk populations.

Research studies have shown population declines in white-tailed and mule deer and elk in Wyoming.

CWD decreases deer life expectancy.

In Colorado, CWD-infected mule deer live just 1.6 years versus 5.2 years for uninfected animals.

CWD spreads geographically and prevalence increases with time.

In Wisconsin, CWD was first detected in white-tailed deer in 2002. Now, 50% of adult males and 30% of adult females in some Wisconsin counties are infected.

DEC has an obligation to protect public trust resources, like wild deer and moose, for current and future generations to enjoy.

White-tailed and mule deer herds heavily infected with CWD have experienced population declines. Hunting interest and participation has decreased in some states that have CWD.

The CDC recommends no one knowingly consume a CWD-positive animal.

CWD is in the same family as “mad cow” disease that has caused fatal infections in a small percentage of people in the U.K. As of 2019, there are no known cases of CWD transmission to humans.

Prions that cause CWD are found in deer and elk urine, saliva, and feces.

A deer can appear healthy and shed prions for more than a year before it eventually starts to look and act sick, dies, and is tested.

There is no way to ensure that urine products are free of prions.

Numerous captive cervid facilities have become CWD-positive in the past five years despite the USDA CWD herd certification program. The Archery Trade Association Deer Protection Program's voluntary guidelines are not sufficient to ensure product safety because deer are tested only after death. The U.K. and Norway have banned urine products from the U.S. because of the risk for CWD introduction.

Prions bind to soil. They are taken up into plants and remain infectious in the environment for years.

Pouring infected urine products into scrapes or putting urine on the landscape could create a "hotspot" for infection. Hunters using these products could accidentally introduce CWD into their favorite hunting spots. Captive deer are known to have become infected just by being housed in a pen that had previously held CWD-positive deer.

There is no safe dose of prions.

CWD is highly contagious. Animals become infected by animal-to-animal contact or by exposure to prions in the environment. Once infected, it will often take more than a year for the animal to die.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Follow CWD regulations (6 NYCRR Part 189):

www.dec.ny.gov/regs/2494.html

Don't ship or import a whole carcass or an intact trophy head.

Only the deboned meat, cleaned skull cap, antlers with no flesh adhering, raw or processed cape or hide, cleaned teeth or lower jaw, and finished taxidermy products of CWD-susceptible animals may be brought into New York.

Don't feed wild deer in New York State.

Feeding deer concentrates animals around a food source. Sharing food creates opportunities for disease transmission from one deer to another.

Consider alternatives to natural cervid urine scent or lure products.

Choose fully synthetic alternatives. DEC will continue to assess threats from urine products prior to prohibiting use.

Dispose of carcasses properly.

Hunters, taxidermists, and meat processors can help by disposing of all waste material in a municipal landfill.

Report violators.

Taxidermists and deer processors are the frontline for detecting possible importation of CWD infected material. If you discover that carcasses or parts of deer, elk or moose were brought into New York illegally, call an Environmental Conservation Officer: 1-877-457-5680.

Report sick deer or deer behaving abnormally.

Contact your nearest DEC regional wildlife office or Environmental Conservation Officer to report such a deer's location.

Should you get your deer tested?

Every year, DEC conducts disease surveillance to look for CWD. Deer heads and samples are collected from meat processors and taxidermists. If you would like to have your animal tested, Cornell University's Animal Health Diagnostic Center provides testing for a fee. Contact cwhl@cornell.edu for more information.

ACTIONS DEC IS TAKING

Collects and tests hunter-harvested deer for CWD

Responds to reports of sick wild deer and tests them for CWD

Enforces regulations to prevent importation and illegal disposal of potentially infected CWD material

Shares information on CWD with stakeholders including guidance for hunters

Updated December 2019