BC CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?
Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a neurological disease of species in the deer family (cervids), including deer, elk and moose. The disease is caused by abnormal proteins (prions) that accumulate in the brain. There is no vaccine or treatment – the disease is always fatal.

What does Chronic Wasting Disease look like?
An infected animal may not show any symptoms for several months, but as the disease progresses symptoms include: weight loss, poor coordination, stumbling, drooling, increased drinking and urination.

How is Chronic Wasting Disease spread?
An infected animal will shed infectious proteins (prions) throughout the course of the disease through urine, feces, saliva. The CWD proteins may also enter the environment via infected carcasses, tissues, or contaminated material such as plants or urine-based scents. Animals are exposed to the disease by direct animal to animal contact or contact with a contaminated environment. The disease can then be spread by natural animal movement or human movement of infected animals, animal parts or contaminated materials.

Is Chronic Wasting Disease related to “Mad Cow” or BSE?
BSE (in cattle), Scrapie (in sheep) and CWD (in cervids) are all caused by abnormal proteins (prions) and belong to a family of diseases called Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies or TSEs – but they are very different diseases.

Can Chronic Wasting Disease be transmitted to humans or Livestock?
There is no evidence that CWD can be transmitted to humans or livestock, however there is still a lot which is unknown about prion diseases, so it is strongly recommended that infected animals are not eaten.

Has Chronic Wasting Disease been detected in BC?
No. BC has been doing CWD surveillance in wild deer, elk and moose since 2002 and there have been no cases to date.

What is BC doing about Chronic Wasting Disease?
The BC CWD Program’s priority is prevention through proactive management, use of regulatory tools to reduce risk and disease introduction and outreach to increase awareness. Surveillance has been carried out since 2002 and is critical to ensure early detection. BC has an active CWD
team that includes a Provincial CWD Advisory committee and Regional CWD working groups. This team includes stakeholders, First Nations, regional government staff, CWD experts and academic partners.

What is the General Order for mandatory submissions?

It is a legal requirement to submit the head of any white-tailed deer or mule deer harvested with specific wildlife management units (4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-5, 4-6, 4-7) for CWD testing at a designated drop off location. The order is effective from September 1, 2019 to November 30th, 2019.

Why did the Province issue a General Order for mandatory submission?

CWD was recently detected close to the BC border in Libby, Montana. These are the closest cases to BC and within the range of natural animal movement, therefore it is imperative that we confirm B.C.’s CWD status through testing.

What about Moose and Elk in the mandatory zone?

Hunters are encouraged to voluntarily submit elk and moose from the mandatory management units, but this is not required under the general order. All CWD in Northwest Montana have been in white-tailed deer – so white-tailed and mule deer are the priority sample populations.

What about animals harvested outside of the mandatory zone?

Hunters are encouraged to voluntarily submit all deer species (deer, elk, moose) harvested from target areas including the Kootenay and Peace regions. Other areas of interest include the south Okanagan. All deer elk and moose submitted to the CWD program will be tested for CWD.

Do I have to submit the head within the Kootenay Region?

Hunters are asked to submit heads at one of the designated freezer locations before leaving the Kootenay Region. This is encouraged to ensure timely turnaround on results and to avoid transporting high risk tissues (brain) long distances. 15 freezer locations have been established through the Kootenay region to provide convenient drop off for hunters.

Where are the drop off locations?

15 drop off locations have been established in the Kootenay Region. There are also drop off locations in the Peace, Okanagan, Thompson and on Vancouver Island. Drop off locations can be found on the BC CWD website: www.gov.bc.ca/chronicwastingdisease

What documentation is required for submitting a head for testing?

Hunter name, phone number, FWID# and harvest location (MU) are the most important pieces of information and must be submitted with the samples. Ear tags are provided at the drop off locations for the hunter to complete and attached to the head.

How long does the hunter have to submit their head?

One week from date of harvest – if within mandatory zone.
Can I keep the antlers?

Yes. Hunters are encouraged to remove the antlers. The tissues required for testing are at the back of the throat and base of the skull. Antlers can be removed with the skull plate. For a European mount, the upper jaw and skull can be kept with the lower jaw, throat and neck submitted for testing.

What is the procedure for submitting samples?

Every freezer location includes instructions and supplies for submission.

- Complete information on the ear tag
- Attach entire ear tag (with hunter contact and harvest location) to the head with zap strap
- Place head with ear tag into a garbage bag and tie off
- Place garbage bag into freezer

What is a good sample?

- Fresh, not rotten
- Over one year of age
- Not shot in head (preferred)
- Includes tissues at the back of the throat and base of skull – lymph nodes, tonsils and brain stem
- Includes hunter contact and location information

Is there a cost for submitting a head for testing?

There is no cost to the hunter for submitting a head for testing?

Who pays for the delivery of the BC CWD Program?

Program costs managed by the BC Government, however significant in-kind and financial contributions have been made by the BC Wildlife Federation, the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and other partners.

If I submit a head for testing – when will I get results?

Turnaround time for results will be 4-5 weeks from time of submission - assuming heads are left in the Kootenay Region. Will be longer if transported and dropped off outside of the Kootenay Region.

How will hunters be informed about sampling results?

If a positive result is found, the hunter will be contacted directly and immediately. Negative results will be posted to the website, www.gov.bc.ca/chronicwastingdisease

What will happen if my animal tests positive for CWD?

If a positive result is found, the hunter will be contacted directly and immediately. The hunter will be advised (by public health authorities) to not consume the meat and asked to turn the meat in to the BC Wildlife Health Program or the Conservation Officer Service for proper disposal.
If a hunter’s sample is positive, will they get another tag to replace the diseased animal?

Not at this time.

If a hunter ends up with an animal that tests positive, will they be legally obliged to turn in all tissue and meat?

No. It is the hunter’s choice to turn in the meat of a CWD positive animal. It is strongly recommended that that meat is not eaten and is turned in so that it is disposed of properly (to avoid environmental contamination) in a licensed incineration facility or lined landfill.

Will the mandatory submission order be enforced?

The general order for mandatory submissions is a legal requirement, however as it is under the Animal Health Act so is not enforceable by the Conservation Officer Service under the Wildlife Act.

What can be done if CWD is present in a free-ranging population?

As demonstrated by affected jurisdictions, once the disease is present in a free-ranging population mitigation strategies and tools are limited. Eradication is likely impossible unless detected very early and an intensive rapid response applied. Efforts to prevent spread and minimize exposure to healthy animals may involve regulation changes in specific areas. **PREVENTION IS THE BEST STRATEGY.**

What will happen if CWD is detected in BC?

The Provincial CWD Advisory committee and Regional CWD Working group will be assembled to determine initial response actions. These actions will be determined collaboratively with stakeholders, First Nations, regional government staff, CWD experts and academic partners. The actions in general are presented in the *Surveillance and Response Plan for Chronic Wasting Disease in BC* and will be led by the provincial wildlife veterinarian.