

University of Illinois Extension

Chronic Wasting Disease Management Strategy

[Chronic wasting disease](#) (CWD) was first discovered in white-tailed deer in Illinois in 2002. Chronic wasting disease is a neurological disease that is fatal to deer, and it poses a serious threat to deer populations in areas where it occurs. There is currently no treatment or vaccination available. Studies to date have found no evidence that humans can contract CWD from contact with deer or from eating venison (muscle).

Illinois CWD management strategy takes two approaches to reduce the spread of CWD: 1) lower deer densities in "high risk" counties by increasing public hunting opportunities (i.e., make more deer hunting permits available and schedule a special CWD firearm deer season) and 2) IDNR employees conduct an annual sharpshooting program after deer hunting ends. By lowering deer densities, it is hoped that dispersal of deer from infected areas and the spread of the disease can be reduced. Since CWD is more prevalent among deer 1.5 years and older, a high population turnover rate through increased deer harvest and IDNR sharpshooting activities will move the population toward a younger age structure. The post-hunting season sharpshooting efficiently increases the removal of sick animals from the landscape. If more deer are removed than get sick, it may be possible to significantly reduce or eliminate CWD in Illinois.

CWD management is conducted through monitoring and surveillance of hunter-killed deer from all deer seasons in "high risk" counties of northern Illinois. Hunters are required to check all firearm deer season kills at a check station where IDNR biologists remove samples from adult animals for CWD testing. Hunters are asked to report the location of kill to the nearest square mile.

With the landowner's permission, IDNR biologists and Conservation Police Officers conduct follow-up sharpshooting. Shooting is conducted only in those areas known to have the disease, generally within two miles of locations where deer positive for CWD were taken during the hunting season. Sharpshooting is conducted in the late afternoon and at night using high-powered rifles. Deer are shot over bait (to control the zone of fire as a safety precaution), and with the use of an artificial light source, if needed.

At the conclusion of each sharpshooting session, all deer are removed from the property intact (not field-dressed) to a site where the tissue samples used to test for CWD are collected and processing the deer for human consumption begins. The meat from deer not testing positive is released for use by various charities. Meat from deer that test positive for CWD is incinerated.



A buck is sampled for Chronic Wasting Disease at a deer check station. Photo courtesy of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

[Click on the image to view the large version.](#)



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For more information about CWD please read the [What Illinois' Hunters and Landowners Need to Know](#) brochure. The Illinois Department of Agriculture also provides information on [precautions for handling and processing deer](#).

Controlling Deer Numbers

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