

Chronic Wasting Disease: **Recommended Practices for Deer Hunters**

The following information is intended for deer hunters living or hunting in chronic wasting disease (CWD) outbreak areas. This information does not cover all that is known about managing CWD, rather it provides simple precautions and answers many frequently asked questions that QDMA has received from hunters in areas affected by this deadly disease. The information is based around the Four Cornerstones of Quality Deer Management (QDM) and how deer hunters can assist in each area. It was compiled from multiple sources including the CWD Alliance (CWD-info.org), USGS National Wildlife Health Center (nwhc.usgs.gov), Michigan DNR (Michigan.gov), and QDMA (QDMA.com).

HERD MANAGEMENT

One of the most important things we can do once CWD is detected in a wild deer population is reduce the spread of the disease and attempt to contain it. CWD is spread from deer to deer through direct contact, through contact with the urine, feces, saliva or blood of infected deer, and through indirect transmission by contact with contaminated materials like soil, bait piles and mineral licks. Thus, reducing the spread of disease means reducing deer density. Significantly reducing deer numbers is never palatable to hunters, but this step is important for the future of the deer herd.

Should we shoot most bucks at 1½ years of age to keep them from maturing?

When CWD is first discovered in a new area, initial goals include identifying prevalence and distribution of the disease and preventing it from spreading. In this early stage of an outbreak, protecting *any* adult deer can be counterproductive to long-term success. Once CWD is established in the deer herd, older bucks are two to four times more likely to have the disease than younger bucks. Therefore, on paper, the best way to combat CWD *where it is established* is to keep density low and the age structure young. That means not allowing bucks or does to mature. However, in reality, hunters are needed to regulate

deer populations, and many hunters stay engaged for the opportunity to pursue mature bucks. It is QDMA's opinion that as long as hunters continue hunting, shooting antlerless deer, and helping keep deer herds in check, then it is more beneficial to have some mature bucks in the population than to shoot all bucks at a young age. If mature bucks are scarce, some hunters will become less engaged and shoot fewer antlerless deer. Therefore, QDMA's recommendation *in areas where CWD is established in the population* is for hunters is to harvest antlerless deer to help reduce deer density, continue protecting yearling bucks if you desire, but apply increased harvest pressure to all bucks 3½ years of age or older.

Are healthy deer less susceptible to CWD?

No. Individual deer health does not seem to be a factor. Healthy or not, if a deer is exposed to a dose of infectious material, it will likely contract CWD, and it will die of the disease in one to three years in most cases, if it is not killed by some other factor first.

Should I eat the venison from deer harvested in a CWD management zone?

Yes, but only *after* you receive satisfactory results from a CWD test. There is currently no evidence CWD has been transmitted to humans. Nevertheless, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourages hunters in outbreak zones to have each deer tested, and then only consume the venison if CWD was not detected.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

There has been very little research on how habitat management impacts CWD prevalence or spread.

Should we discourage the use of food plots?

No, the science is not strong enough to discourage food-plot use. On the plus side, food plots can assist in herd management and harvesting antlerless deer. From a disease standpoint, you do not want to artificially congregate deer at small sites, as with bait, supplemental feed or minerals.

Should we discourage the planting of root crops or other species where multiple deer can take a bite from nearly the same spot?

Not at this point. No one has studied whether this enhances disease transmission. However, even in clover fields or under apple or oak trees where different animals may not eat from a similar spot, their urine, feces and saliva can still be deposited in the area for others to come in contact with and potentially increase the risk of CWD transmission. Given this, discouraging the use of root crops, corn, etc. is probably not warranted at this time.



HUNTER MANAGEMENT

CWD is most easily transported via live deer and parts of infected deer. As hunters, we should oppose movement of live deer, and we should avoid moving high-risk parts of dead animals from a known disease area. These parts include the brain, spine, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes. One of the most important things a hunter who takes a deer home can do is make certain unused carcass parts end up at a landfill and not in the environment where other deer can encounter them.

Why should hunters stay engaged?

It is crucial for hunters to stay engaged to help manage deer herds. Hunters are the most important deer management tool, and no wildlife agency can manage deer without their help.

How can QDM Cooperatives help?

Cooperatives can play a huge role in managing CWD. Cooperatives provide the perfect venue to share information, keep hunters engaged, and ensure adequate deer harvest in their area. Cooperatives are the future of deer management across the whitetail's range, and this is especially true for areas with CWD.



HERD MONITORING

When CWD hits an area, monitoring herd health and age structure is more important than ever.

How can I monitor the herd in my area?

You can conduct trail-camera and/or observational surveys to estimate deer density. You can collect harvest

data to monitor changes in age structure and herd productivity and health. These efforts can be greatly enhanced through participation in a QDM Cooperative.

What can hunters do to assist with monitoring CWD?

You can support the state wildlife agency's efforts. Become informed on the regulations regarding deer harvest and reporting. Submit all deer you harvest for data collection and testing at the designated location for your area. Stay engaged on the issue, inform your neighbors about the importance of reporting sick deer and following deer check-in regulations (in both CWD-positive and negative areas), do your part to harvest antlerless deer, take advantage of CWD testing offered by the state, and be a supporting partner of your state wildlife agency.

What is the long-term outlook for CWD in my area?

In the early stages of an outbreak, it is possible to break the cycle of transmission by rapidly lowering deer density and hopefully killing any additional infected deer in the area. However, once the disease is established and additional cases continue to appear, the goal might be shifted to continue holding density low and maintaining a younger age structure to help slow the spread of the disease. CWD moves slowly through a population, and it kills individual deer slowly. The impact is not dramatic or rapid, which is why some hunters believe CWD is not a serious problem. However, over the course of years, CWD will gradually grow in prevalence and will eventually reduce populations.

For now, it's best for all hunters to focus on preventing CWD from spreading into new areas. If it arrives, it's best to focus on preventing its growth and expansion. Researchers are currently working to learn more about the disease, the best methods of control, and the potential for a CWD vaccine. Hopefully, the years to come will bring us new understanding and new tools to combat this serious challenge to whitetails and our deer hunting heritage.

About QDMA

QDMA is dedicated to ensuring the future of white-tailed deer, wildlife habitat and our hunting heritage. Founded in 1988, QDMA is a national nonprofit wildlife conservation organization with more than 60,000 members in all 50 states and Canada. To learn more, call 800-209-3337 or visit www.QDMA.com.