

Hunters can help against CWD spreading amongst deer

News

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Hunters play an important role in preventing the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD), according to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). Agency officials urge hunters to take simple, common-sense precautions when processing deer.

CWD is caused by abnormal proteins, called prions, which can remain infective for years. The disease attacks the nervous systems of members of the deer family and is always fatal.

Deer can become infected if they are exposed to soil containing CWD prions. One way for prions to get into soil is through improper disposal of infected, hunter-killed deer. Since many hunters process their own deer, they are key players in preventing the spread of CWD.

CWD has been found in free-ranging deer in Macon County. MDC has established a CWD Containment Zone in Adair, Chariton, Linn, Macon, Randolph and Sullivan counties and has taken measures to confine the disease to this area. However, MDC officials say hunter's help is absolutely essential to the success of containment efforts.

CWD prions are concentrated in deer's spine, brain, spleen, eyes, tonsils and lymph nodes. When processing deer, hunters should avoid cutting through bones, the spine or brain. Hunters who hunt somewhere other than home need to bring knives and containers so they can remove meat from bones and leave behind potentially infectious material.

After processing, send the carcass and other parts to a state-approved landfill so they will be properly buried. This can be accomplished by double bagging the carcass remains and sending them through municipal trash collection. If this is impractical, bury the carcass deep enough that scavengers can not dig it up.

Trophies require some precautions as well. Taxidermists use artificial forms to create mounts, so there is no reason to keep the skull, which could carry prions. When removing the cape from the carcass, also skin the head. Use a power saw to remove the antlers, along with a small portion of the skull that joins them. Clean the inside of the skull plate with chlorine bleach before leaving the area where the deer was killed.

MDC also encourages hunters who harvest deer within the CWD Containment Zone to donate tissue samples. This is part of CWD monitoring that MDC has been conducting since 2002.

The Missouri Wildlife Code requires hunters who harvest deer, elk or moose out of state and bring the animal with the spinal column or head attached into Missouri to report the animal's entry within 24 hours and take the carcass to a licensed meat processor or taxidermist within 72 hours of entry. This is designed to prevent introducing CWD into new areas of Missouri from other states.

Details about these measures are listed in the 2012 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information booklet, which is available at MDC offices, where hunting permits are sold and online at mdc.mo.gov/node/3656.