



Chronic Wasting Disease *Game Meat Advisory*

It has recently become known that donated deer meat from a farm in the North Battleford region made available in the community of Pinehouse in the fall of 2007 included meat from one animal that tested positive for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).

Approximately 45 game animals were deboned, cut, wrapped and frozen and then brought by van to Pinehouse in September, October and November. One of those animals tested positive in July when a batch of samples was submitted for testing. All the other animals tested negative for CWD.

There is no scientific evidence at this time that CWD has ever spread to humans, either through contact with infected animals or by eating the meat of infected animals. However, we want to ensure that all precautions are taken to safeguard human health, and we recommend that people limit their risk of exposure to CWD-infected meat products. Anyone still in possession of this meat from the game farm should dispose of it. This advisory does not apply to wild game harvested in Northern Saskatchewan.

Questions and answers regarding CWD and human health are below. There are also a number of very good websites that can provide more detailed information on the disease and surveillance programs in effect.

Some Questions and Answers on CWD

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is NOT a disease affecting humans. It is a progressive, fatal, infectious disease of the nervous system that affects members of the deer family such as elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer.

What are the symptoms in the elk and deer?

There may not be any noticeable symptoms for a number of years after the animal is infected. Eventually, animals may show loss of condition, excessive salivation, trouble swallowing, difficulty in judging distance, changes in behaviour and drooping ears. However, these symptoms *can* occur with other diseases as well.

How is it diagnosed?

The disease is tentatively diagnosed based on clinical signs, but can only be confirmed by laboratory examination of brain tissue from the affected animal after it is dead.

Are humans at risk?

There is no scientific evidence at this time that CWD has ever spread to humans, either through contact with infected animals or by eating the meat of infected animals.

However, public health officials advise caution and recommend that human exposure to CWD be avoided as they continue to evaluate any potential health risk.

If there is no evidence that this can affect humans, why do we need to avoid eating this meat?

Although there is no scientific evidence to date that CWD is a human health risk, we want to ensure that all precautions are taken to safeguard human health so it is most prudent to minimize the potential for exposure to these materials. Research into the disease has been ongoing since before CWD was first recognized in Saskatchewan in 1996 and we have learned a lot since then.

If we have eaten some of the meat – what do we need to do now?

As a precaution, do not eat any more of that suspected meat. There is no other action required on your part.

Will I become sick from eating this meat?

It is extremely unlikely. CWD has been around for several decades in elk and deer in some US states and to date there has been no scientific evidence of human illness associated with eating meat from infected animals.

How should we dispose of any of that meat if we still have some?

Any remaining meat should be considered as food waste and disposed of in the same manner. It can be disposed of in the local landfill. It can also be buried or burned.

When was this meat brought to the community?

It's our understanding that it was harvested late last fall.

Where did the meat come from?

It came from a game farm in the North Battleford region.

Why are we only hearing about it now?

Samples were only submitted recently. Appropriate communications were undertaken as soon as the results came in.

What is the government of Saskatchewan doing about Chronic Wasting Disease?

The Ministries of Agriculture and Environment are working cooperatively with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on CWD monitoring and control procedures.

The Ministry of Agriculture is working with the CFIA and industry on long term CWD surveillance and control programs.

The Ministry of Environment implemented a CWD surveillance program in wild deer in 1997 after the first case of CWD was detected in farmed elk in Saskatchewan. Heads from hunter killed animals are collected and submitted for CWD testing.

If you would like more details about the CWD surveillance program please check the Ministry of Environment website or pick up a 2008 Hunters' and Trappers' Guide.

What regulations does the Ministry of Agriculture have in place with regards to Chronic Wasting Disease?

All game farms must be licensed. All game farms participate in the mandatory CWD surveillance program. Producer responsibilities under the program involve reporting deaths (including those from on farm slaughter) to the Ministry of Agriculture within 48 hours of the death and submitting test samples from all animals over 12 months of age within 15 days of death.

Is it easier for CWD to spread on a game farm than it is in the wild?

It can be – whenever animals are in close proximity to one another, there is a greater chance of an infection spreading.

Can meat be tested for CWD?

There is no commercially available test to detect the presence of the agent which causes CWD in a sample of meat. In order to test a deer or elk for this disease, a sample of the brain or certain lymph nodes must be submitted to an appropriate diagnostic laboratory.

What are the regulations for farm slaughter?

There are numerous farmers that slaughter their own animals for their own use or sometimes for sale to third parties. They are unregulated and un-inspected.

The Ministry has done some consultation in the past and were given clear indication that farm gate slaughter is an accepted practise in the province. The Ministry of Agriculture currently regulates 12 provincial slaughter plants that operate under inspection. There are another 75 plus slaughter plants licensed by the Regional Health Authorities that operate without carcass inspection.

Are there any regulations or rules around selling or giving away meat that has not been inspected?

There are currently no regulations that require meat that is sold or given away by a farmer to an individual be inspected. Meat sold at retail, restaurants, farmers markets, etc. must come from an approved source, which means that the abattoir slaughtering the animal must be licensed, but does not, at present, require carcass inspection.

What should we do if we have wild meat that we would like tested?

CWD testing can only be done on the brain tissues. If you have wild deer, elk, moose or caribou that you want to get CWD tested and you still have the heads frozen, you can bring the head into your local Ministry of Environment field offices. CWD testing of wild deer, elk or moose is provided for free.

Where can we find out more information?

There are several good websites available with more information on Chronic Wasting Disease.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/cwdmdc/cwdmdce.shtml>

Public health Agency of Canada

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cjd-mcj

For locations of positive CWD cases in the wild, visit the Ministry of Environment website - <http://www.environment.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=171eb429-d529-4635-9877-d01c8f5b48b1>

The information included here is also available on the Mamawetan Churchill River Health Region website at <http://www.mcrrha.sk.ca/>