

November 12, 2019

Dear Hunters Sharing the Harvest Processor,

Thank you for your continued support of the Hunters Sharing the Harvest (HSH) Program. Through the generosity of the hunters and processors who participate in the program, over 1.2 million pounds of meat have been donated to the charitable food system. Given the noble mission of this program, the Department values the care and consideration that hunters and meat processors give when handling and preparing product for distribution. As deer season approaches, we offer the following guidance as a reminder to take necessary precautions to make sure venison entering the charitable food system is safe.

At this time, current published scientific studies support the hypothesis that there is a strong species barrier protecting humans from Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), and to date, there have not been any documented cases of humans being infected with CWD. Since Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been in Pennsylvania for several years, there is a heightened awareness of the disease among Pennsylvania hunters, consumers, and food banks.

In response to recent questions, the PA Department of Agriculture is sharing several voluntary **Best Management Practices (BMPs) that can be practiced by hunters and processors**. These voluntary BMPs include handling carcasses properly and discarding high risk parts with abnormal proteins – including brain, eyes, tonsils, lymph nodes, backbone, spleen and anything containing visible brain or spinal cord material. Many hunters are participating with the PA Department of Agriculture and PA Game Commission to test the heads of wild deer for CWD in Disease Management Areas. These practices help protect hunters and their families against CWD.

It is important to follow commonsense safe-handling practices to help safeguard hunters and their families, as well as processors and consumers within the charitable food system, to prevent the spread of the disease. These include:

- Do not shoot, handle or eat meat from wild deer or elk that look sick, are acting strangely, or are found dead. However, keep in mind that most CWD-infected deer do not look or act sick.
- Report any sightings of sick or abnormal-acting wild deer or elk to the PA Game Commission.
- If you are hunting in or near a [disease management area \(DMA\)](#), place your deer's head in PA Game Commission collection containers to submit it for CWD testing.
- If you have your deer or elk commercially processed, consider asking that your animal be processed separately to avoid mixing meat from multiple animals.
- Processors participating in the Hunters Sharing the Harvest program and processing deer harvested from a DMA are recommended to take extra care to thoroughly clean equipment after processing each wild deer for donation.

- Processors participating in the Hunters Sharing the Harvest program are recommended to process wild deer for donation separately to avoid mixing meat from multiple animals.
- When field-dressing or processing deer:
 - Wear latex or rubber gloves.
 - Minimize how much you handle the organs, particularly brain or spinal cord tissue.
 - Do not use household knives or other kitchen utensils for field dressing.
- Double bag high-risk parts and dispose of in an approved landfill.
- Processors interested in learning more about voluntary best management practices can review the recent publication by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries: [Best Management Practices for Deer Processors and Taxidermists: Reducing the Risk of CWD Transmission and Contamination.](#)

After considering published scientific studies and best management practices, if hunters hunting outside of a DMA are still concerned, they can have their deer tested for an \$80 fee through the PA Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System (PADLS). An FAQ on testing locations, fees and sample submission process can be found on the [PADLS website](#). To [learn more about CWD in Pennsylvania](#) visit pgc.pa.gov.

Our collective challenge, while we continue to work with all our stakeholders on CWD research and use that research to refine our management strategies, is to be guided by the latest scientific studies and follow safe handling practices so we can continue our hunting heritage and safely provide this important protein source for ourselves and those in our community at risk of hunger.

Regards,



Michael K. Hanna, Jr.
Executive Deputy Secretary