

Iowa Venison – Is it Safe to Eat?

In recent years, there has been a whirlwind of media coverage on four diseases that have the potential to infect Iowa's wild white-tailed deer population.

CWD: Chronic Wasting Disease

CWD affects the central nervous system of cervids (Elk, Moose, Caribou and Deer). It is closely related to Mad Cow Disease. They are both TSE's or Transmissible Spongiform encephalopathies, also called prion diseases. CWD has been found in free ranging elk and deer herds in Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, New York, Utah, West Virginia, Wyoming, Nebraska as well as in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada. It has appeared in captive herds in those states and provinces as well. This is partially due to the frequency of "trading" amongst captive deer herders from all over the United States & Canada. This practice inadvertently spreads the disease to other captive herds. When a deer with CWD escapes into the wild, it can effect the local wild populations.

BT: Bovine Tuberculosis

BT is transferable to all mammals, including humans. It is a bacterial infection that can be treated with antibiotics. Iowa has been a BT free state since 1986. Outbreaks occasionally happen in the Midwest. Some outbreaks have occurred in dairy herds, deer and elk in Michigan.

FMD: Foot & Mouth Disease

Foot and mouth disease is a viral infection that runs its course in a few weeks, and is unlikely to infect humans. It occurs frequently outside of North America, infecting cloven-hoofed mammals.

HD: Hemorrhagic Disease

This virus occurs mostly in the southeastern United States, with very few outbreaks in the Midwest. It can infect a wide range of ruminants, both wild and domestic, but does not infect humans.

It is highly unlikely that eating venison from wild Iowa deer will induce any of these diseases. However, you can limit your exposure by following these preventative measures:

- Avoid harvesting obviously sick or thin deer.
- Wear latex or rubber gloves when field dressing deer.
- Bone out the meat.
- Avoid handling and do not eat the brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after dressing out and handling.
- Thoroughly cook all meat, including sausages and jerky, until juices run clear.

Report dead deer that appear thin or have lesions or growths on the internal organs or chest cavity to a DNR Biologist or Conservation Officer.