

## Chronic Wasting Disease — What to Know Before the Hunt

**Q:** What is Chronic Wasting Disease, or “CWD?”

**A:** Chronic Wasting Disease is a brain disease of wildlife that’s fatal to deer and elk. It can take more than a year before an infected animal develops symptoms of CWD, which can include drastic weight loss (wasting), stumbling, listlessness and other neurological symptoms. There are no treatments or vaccines.

**Q:** Has the disease been detected in Arizona?

**A:** No. The Arizona Game and Fish Department has been testing for the presence of CWD in Arizona since 1998. While CWD has been found in the neighboring states of Utah, New Mexico and Colorado, the disease has not been detected here.

**Q:** What is the department doing to protect Arizona’s deer and elk from CWD?

**A:** The best opportunity for effective management lies with early detection. This cannot be accomplished without the assistance of Arizona’s hunters. In addition to increased surveillance by Game and Fish, hunters are encouraged to bring the head of their harvested animal to any department office statewide for testing between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The preferred method for delivery is to place the head in a heavy-duty plastic trash bag, and keep it cool and out of the sun.

**Q:** When did the department impose regulations related to the importation of legally harvested deer and elk?

**A:** The department implemented a rule change in 2013 that outlined the harvested cervid restrictions. Arizona Commission Rule R12-4-305.I was created to only allow importation of the following portions of cervids legally harvested in another state.

1. Boneless portions of meat, or meat that has been cut and packaged either personally or commercially;
2. Clean hides and capes with no skull or soft tissue attached, except as required for proof of legality;
3. Clean skulls with antlers, clean skull plates, or antlers with no meat or soft tissue attached
4. Finished taxidermy mounts or products; and
5. Upper canine teeth with no meat or tissue attached.

**Q:** Has the legally harvested cervid rule been changed since 2013?

**A:** Yes. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission approved an amendment to R-12-4-305.I.3 in 2019 to include velvet antlers.

**Q:** Can a hunter who legally harvests a deer or elk in another state bring it back to Arizona?

**A:** Yes, as long as the animal has been processed and complies with the restrictions identified in R-12-4-305.I.

**Q:** Can a hunter who legally harvests a deer or elk in another state bring back antlers in “velvet?”

**A:** Yes. Velvet antlers contain blood and soft tissue. In order to be in compliance, the antlers would need to be stripped of velvet prior to entering the state, or the velvet must be treated. Freeze drying or injecting the antlers with a formaldehyde solution are the two most common

methods of preserving velvet. It is recommended that hunters consult with a licensed taxidermist to discuss options to have the velvet preserved prior to bringing the antlers back to Arizona. Following these steps to properly prepare meat, hide and head will allow for hunters to legally bring a harvested animal back into the state and deliver it to their favorite game processor or taxidermist.

**Q:** *Why is properly disposing of infected scraps and nervous tissue important?*

**A:** CWD is transmitted and spread by animal movement and direct contact with infected animals or their remains. The disease-causing agent is present in all of the tissues of an infected animal and are concentrated in the brain, spinal cord and lymph nodes. The illegal importation of a cervid carcass, or parts with brain or spinal column tissue of an infected animal, could introduce the disease into Arizona.

**Q:** *How should these parts be properly disposed?*

**A:** Anyone who harvests, possesses or processes legally imported cervid meat has an obligation to protect Arizona's wildlife. All waste should be double-bagged and discarded at a state-regulated landfill, or placed in a receptacle destined for disposal at a state-regulated landfill.

**Q:** *Should Arizona-based meat processors and taxidermists be worried they could be legally responsible for accepting animals from out-of-state that might not be in accordance with the rule?*

**A:** No. Any violation of the rule that might occur would be in the hunter's importation of the animal, not in the possession of the animal by the meat processor or taxidermist.

**Q:** *What else does a hunter need to know?*

**A:** All hunters are advised not to shoot, handle or consume any animal that is exhibiting abnormal behavior or appears to be sick. Wear latex or rubber gloves when field-dressing deer or elk. All hunters are asked to call the department at 1-(800)-352-0700 if they see or harvest an animal that appears to be sick.

**Q:** *Where can a hunter get more information about CWD?*

**A:** Visit the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance website at <http://cwd-info.org/>.

**Q:** *What can a hunter expect if contacted by an AZGFD officer while importing a deer or elk from another state?*

**A:** The main purpose of the rule is to protect Arizona's wildlife and minimize the chances of importing CWD into the state through hunter-harvested animals from out-of-state. The department's goal is voluntary compliance with these long-standing regulations. AZGFD officers will consider the circumstances of each contact and take appropriate law enforcement actions for violations of this rule. These actions may include any combination of the following: a citation, a written warning, and/or provide guidance on how to be in compliance.

**Q:** *Are department officers citing people for violations of these rules?*

**A:** Department officers were issued a Law Enforcement Directive in 2013 regarding the enforcement of the new CWD requirements. The directive ensured officers took a reasonable and uniform approach to enforcing a newly established regulation. This regulation has now been in place for six years, and the 2013 directive has been repealed. Officers are now taking the appropriate law enforcement action based upon the totality of circumstances related to any given issue.

**Q:** What can meat processors and taxidermists do to further communications about this issue with their customers?

**A:** If meat processors and taxidermists are contacted by customers prior to their hunts, they should be told to take the necessary steps to comply with the rule.

**NOTE:** For additional questions, hunters are advised to contact AZGFD law enforcement at (623) 236-7307.