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Frequently Asked Questions
Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

1. **What is CWD?**
   Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal brain disease caused by abnormal proteins called prions. This disease affects members of the cervid family. Cervids include deer, elk, moose and caribou. CWD is fatal to animals and there are no treatments or vaccines. CWD can affect animals of all ages and some infected animals may die without ever developing the disease.

2. **Signs of Chronic Wasting Disease**
   Early in the disease animals may not show any clinical signs. It may take over a year before an infected animal develops symptoms, which can include drastic weight loss (wasting), stumbling, listlessness, and other neurologic symptoms.

3. **How are animals exposed?**
   An infected deer or elk can transmit the disease whether it is alive or dead. Infected deer can transmit the disease even if they are not currently showing symptoms. The disease can be spread through direct contact between animals such as shared body fluids (ie feces, urine, and saliva) or from plants and soil in a contaminated area. The infectious prions do not readily degrade in the environment.

   Movement of deer is the primary reason for its rapid spread. This is why government agencies and conservation organizations battling CWD favor restrictions on transportation of live deer as well as whole carcasses.

4. **What is the current CWD situation in the United States?**

   As of December 2023, CWD has been found in 32 states, including Kentucky and six of the seven states that border Kentucky (excluding Indiana).

5. **How is it identified?**

   CWD can only be confirmed through tests performed at a USDA approved laboratory. Currently there is no live animal CWD test authorized for Kentucky. Brain and/or lymph

node samples from suspect animals are submitted by accredited licensed veterinarians to the approved laboratory for testing.

Wild cervids suspected of CWD should be reported to Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources for sample collection and testing.

6. Should the public be worried?

According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**, To date, there have been no reported cases of CWD infection in people. However, some animal studies suggest CWD poses a risk to certain types of non-human primates, like monkeys, that eat meat from CWD-infected animals or come in contact with brain or body fluids from infected deer or elk. These studies raise concerns that there may also be a risk to people." The CDC recommends not eating meat from an animal that tests positive for CWD.

7. What is the risk to public health?

Currently there is no scientific evidence that CWD has or can spread to humans, either through contact with or consumption of infected animals. However, the CDC recommends not eating meat from an animal that test positive for CWD.

8. What does this mean for captive cervid farms?

All farmed cervids in Kentucky are required to be enrolled in a Chronic Wasting Disease Herd Certification Program. All farmed cervids in Kentucky are officially identified and herd inventories monitored on a quarterly basis. As part of the state program there is mandatory surveillance which requires all cervids over 12 months of age which die or are harvested be sampled for CWD.

9. What should cervid owners do?

Cervid owners in Kentucky should continue to monitor their herds for clinical signs of disease and contact their veterinarian if they suspect CWD. Farmed cervid should remain vigilant to reduce the risk of possible exposure to CWD through wildlife or other fomites.

10. Is there a cure?

At this time, there is no cure, vaccine or treatment. The disease is always fatal to the animal. Deer or elk may live for years after they become infected and before they are symptomatic.

11. How do you get rid of it?

Very potent chemicals can denature, or degrade, proteins. Otherwise, incineration at a very high temperature or burying it so no other animals can be exposed, can be successful in eliminating the danger of the disease. Burying limits surface exposure because CWD can live in soil for years.

12. Does CWD affect people?

Currently, there is no scientific evidence that CWD has or can spread to humans, either through contact with or consumption of infected animals.

13. What makes CWD different from a virus or bacteria such as blue-tongue disease or hemorrhagic disease?

Chronic wasting disease comes from abnormal proteins formed in the body, called prions. Prions are not living organisms. All animals have proteins in the body, but in the case of a prion, the protein folds abnormally, becomes transmissible and causes holes in the brain, making it a neurological disease.

Other wildlife diseases, like hemorrhagic disease (EHD) caused by a virus, are not always fatal because animals are able to create antibodies to fight the disease. Those types of diseases usually require vectors such as insects to spread, while CWD transfers through contact.

The other big difference is that a virus can be destroyed relatively easily, and there are available vaccines for viruses to help prevent clinical signs. There is no vaccine or other treatments for CWD because these proteins (Prions) already naturally occur in the body, making prevention impossible by current technologies.

It’s important to know that viruses can be survivable, but there are no cases of survival among CWD.