

What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

Dr. Matt Springer and Haley Taylor — Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Kentucky



Visual symptoms of CWD in an adult deer.

Photo courtesy: Terry Kreeger, Wyoming Game and Fish and Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance, 2000.

What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

- CWD is an always fatal brain disease affecting cervids (deer, elk, reindeer, moose, caribou), there is currently no cure.
- It is a type of prion disease (also called Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies), similar to mad cow (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) and Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease in humans.
- Infected animals can transmit the disease, even if they do not exhibit symptoms.
- It is always fatal however animals can be infected for years before showing symptoms (Asymptomatic).
- Affecting the neurological function of the animal, symptoms include decreased body condition(wasting), behavioral changes towards people and other deer, appearance of confusion or nervousness, and repetitive movements.
- Current research indicates CWD is not transmissible to people or livestock however there is still a need to be cautious related to consuming and processing CWD positive animals.
- CWD has been shown to lower survival and reproduction rates of infected individuals which means the population is negatively impacted.

How does CWD spread?

- **Direct Contact** — Spreads by contact and sharing of fluids between individuals.
- **Environmental** — Bodily fluids contaminated with infectious materials (saliva, urine, carcasses of CWD-infected animals) can spread to other individuals as well as be present within the environment (contaminating soil, plants, and water).
- **Indirect Exposure** — There is some evidence that spread can occur (though it is unclear how successfully) via objects or environmental areas (soils, plants, feeding area, mineral licks) thus practices that concentrate individuals to areas of high concentration are potential routes to spread CWD.
- **Natural Movement** — Possibility of “jumps” across the landscape (10-50 miles) due to natural dispersal movements made by juvenile infected deer.
- **Long-distance spread** — CWD has made larger unnatural “jumps” as a result of human-assisted transport. Moving across multiple states and/or thousands of miles, due to animals being moved within the captive cervid industry or other activities.
- Since being first detected in 1967, CWD is now present within captive and wild cervids in well over half of the states within the USA, four Canadian provinces, and multiple other countries.



Collecting Lymph node samples to test for CWD.

Photo courtesy: Taylor, H. 2025.

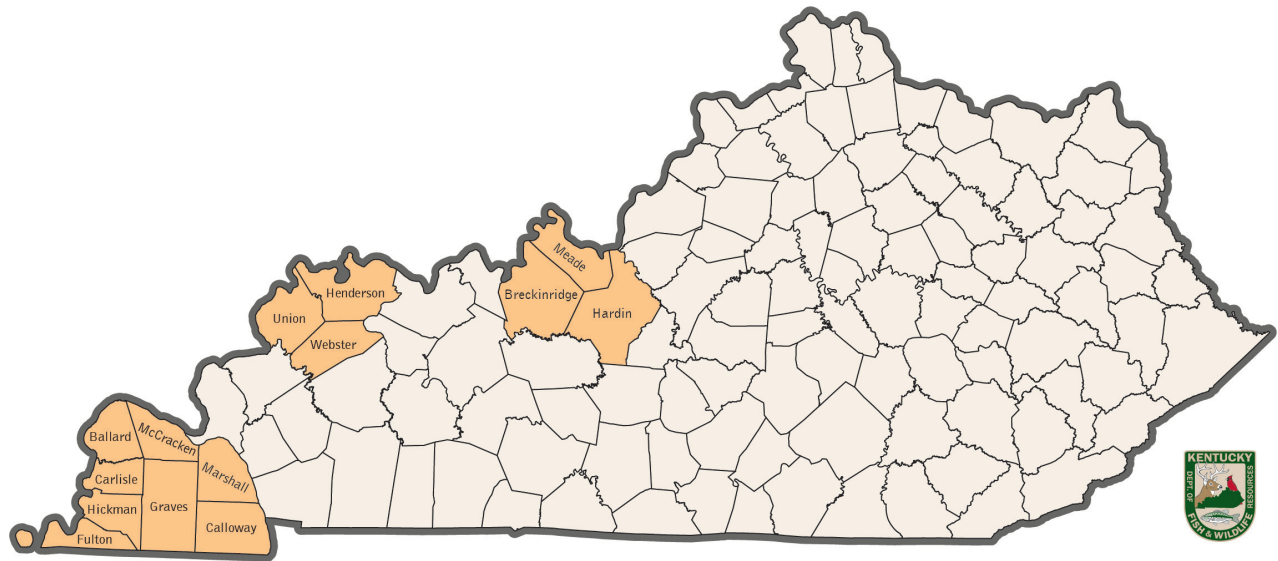


Figure. 1 State of Kentucky, counties within Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance zones.

Figure provided by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

Where is it currently found?

Counties under Kentucky CWD surveillance regulation:

- The total list of 11 counties under CWD surveillance regulations includes Ballard, Breckinridge, Calloway, Carlisle, Fulton, Graves, Hardin, Hickman, Marshall, Meade, and McCracken counties.

Confirmed Cases:

- Ballard County, December 2023
Free-ranging Deer
- Breckinridge County, October 2024
Captive Deer

Surveillance Timeline:

- The first surveillance zones in Kentucky were established on Sept 13, 2021, in 5 counties (Calloway, Carlisle, Fulton, Graves, Marshall) in western Kentucky in response to a detection along the southwestern border in Tennessee.
- In 2024, the surveillance zones expanded in the Western Kentucky Zone to include Ballard, Hickman, and McCracken counties as well as a new Central Kentucky zone added including Breckinridge, Hardin, and Meade counties.

- As of February 2025 in response to a detection in Posey County, Indiana the surveillance zones measures are in effect within Henderson, Union, and Webster counties.

Related policy changes:

- Notable changes have been made to 301 KAR 2:172 and 301 KAR 2:015. With restrictions, the baiting regulations implemented within the SZs after the CWD detection in 2023 per the KDFWR CWD management response plan have been lifted. The change of this prohibition is meant to give hunters more opportunities to harvest deer while reducing deer densities. Base regulations such as no feeding or baiting on any Wildlife Management Areas and prohibition of feeding or baiting from March 1 through July 31 are still in effect. With this, it is still encouraged you consider risks before utilizing baiting. Baiting through promoting the unnatural congregation of deer aids to increase the risk of CWD transmission.

For more information refer to <https://fw.ky.gov/Wildlife/Pages/CWD-SurveillanceZone.aspx>

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