



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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SUBJECT: CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE (CWD) DETECTED IN CALIFORNIA WILD DEER FOR THE FIRST TIME – CWD GUIDANCE FOR DEER FAWN REHABILITATION

Dear California Native Wildlife Rehabilitators and Personnel,

This letter provides information on recent detections of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in California's wild deer populations and the best practices for deer fawn rehabilitation in California consistent with California Fish and Game Code Section 1008, Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 679, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife's CWD Disease Management Program. On May 6, 2024, CWD was confirmed for the first time in California deer, both in Madera and Inyo counties. This fatal disease of deer is the most significant disease of management concern for the species. Wild deer populations can decline where CWD occurs at high prevalence.

CWD Etiology and Clinical Signs:

CWD is caused by a prion (abnormally shaped protein) spread through direct contact with an infected animal or contaminated environment. CWD prions remain infectious for years in contaminated environments (e.g., soil, facilities) and can become sources of new infections and outbreaks. Infected animals can excrete prions in their urine, feces, and saliva, and the carcass and parts thereof (e.g., brain, spinal cord, lymph nodes) infected animals. It can take 15+ months for clinical signs of CWD to appear. Clinical signs are not often observed in fawns due to slow progression of the disease; however infected animals shed prions *prior* to any clinical signs of disease. There is no treatment or vaccine. Clinical signs of CWD include:

- Emaciation, patchy fur/coat.
- Abnormal stance, staggering gait.
- Lethargy, inability to keep head up.
- Excessive thirst or urination, drooling.

Report sick or dead deer fawns to CDFW via our online [Mortality Reporting Form](#) or email at Rehabwildlife@wildlife.ca.gov (cc CWD@wildlife.ca.gov). Sampling and testing of deer are an important part of the CWD Surveillance Program.

Best Practices for California Native Wildlife Rehabilitators:

- Only receive and rehabilitate fawns from within the county where your facility is located.
- Quarantine fawns for 14 days upon intake to observe for any signs of illness or disease.
- Restrict access to any area of the facility where fawn rehabilitation occurs (e.g. intake room).
- Do not transfer any fawn outside of its county of origin at any time.
- Release healthy fawns only to their county of origin in suitable habitat at the location found.
- Do not keep fawns over winter to reduce the risk of facility contamination (infectious prions).
- Adhere to strict cleaning protocols and always use proper personal protective equipment. (See "Practical Guidelines for Processing Deer/Elk Harvested from a CWD Positive State")
- Euthanize a fawn showing signs of illness and fawns with Inyo or Madera counties of origin.
- To dispose of remains, place carcass, parts thereof, or ashes post cremation in double-lined plastic bags and bury at a landfill that accepts animal carcasses (www.CalRecycle.ca.gov).

Further Information:

- [CDFW Chronic Wasting Disease](#) -- Email: CWD@wildlife.ca.gov // Phone: (916) 358-2930
- [Chronic Wasting Disease Information Organization](#)
- [National Wildlife Health Center Distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease in North America](#)