Illinois Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Fact Sheet

2026-2027 Seasons

28	9.3%	2026
Illinois counties with confirmed positive cases of Chronic Wasting Disease	Disease prevalence reached in 2025 across the affected counties	IDNR rolls out a new mail-in sampling kit for hunters to sample deer themselves

What is Chronic Wasting Disease?

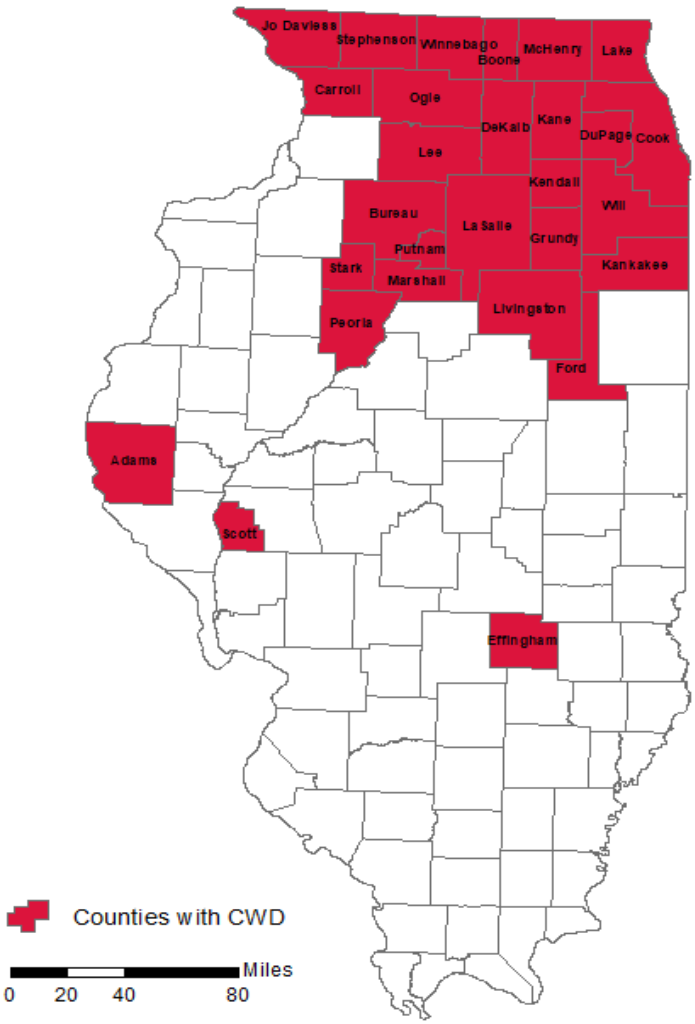
Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease that affects animals in the deer family (deer, elk, moose, and similar species. CWD belongs to the family of prion diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). The misfolded protein known as a prion that causes CWD accumulates in certain parts of infected animals — the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils and spleen.

Why should I be concerned about CWD?

There is currently no treatment or vaccination for CWD. Over time, the disease will spread into new areas and prevalence will increase. CWD can have population-level impacts on white-tailed deer. In areas of high disease prevalence, population declines have been found, particularly in adult deer.

CWD was first identified in wild populations in a small area of northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. However, the distribution of the disease has expanded many states and Canadian provinces. In February 2002, CWD was discovered in wild deer in southern Wisconsin. In November 2002, Illinois confirmed that a CWD-infected deer had been found near Roscoe in Boone County, near the Wisconsin border. ***To date, CWD has been confirmed in 28 Illinois counties.***





More Information on CWD in Illinois

IDNR Chronic Wasting Disease Management

USGS Chronic Wasting Disease FAQs

Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance

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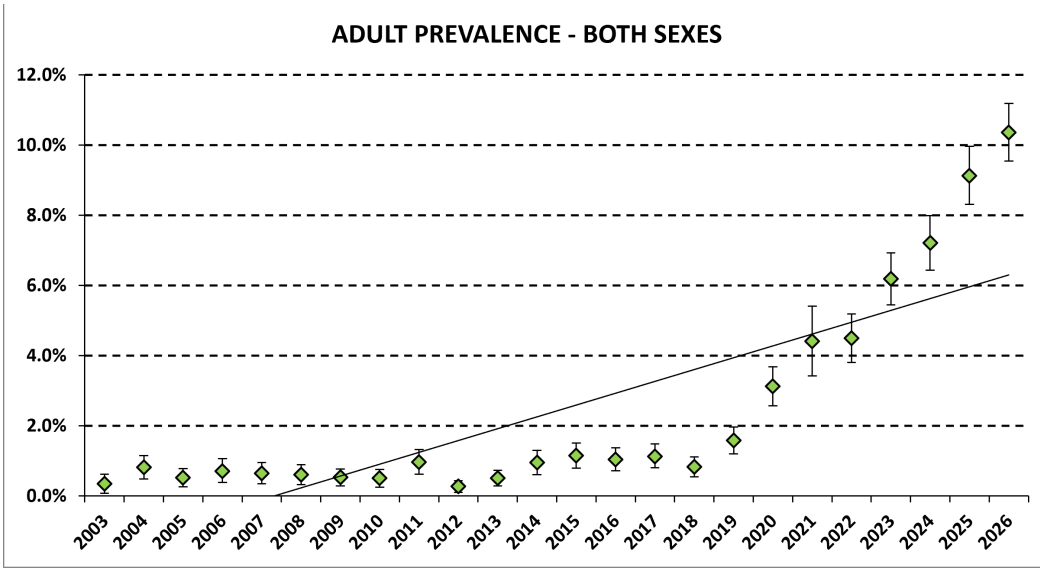

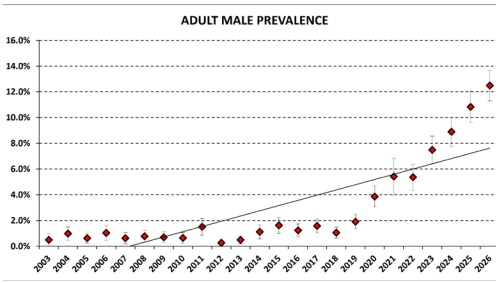

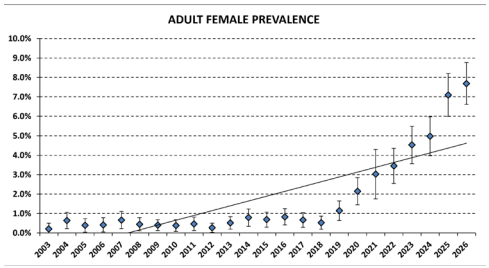

What has been / is being done to address the disease in Illinois?

Regulations Implemented to Prevent the Spread of CWD

- Feeding of deer was banned.
- The parts of hunter-harvested deer, elk and moose that can be brought into Illinois from another state were limited to antlers on a cleaned skull cap, boned-out meat, and hides. Check other state regulations before importing cervids (deer) and their parts.

Surveillance

- Hunters are asked to provide tissue samples of harvested deer:
  - Hunters can have deer tested for free at participating taxidermists and meat processors or by dropping deer heads at designated self-service sampling locations.
  - Firearm deer hunters in CWD counties can have a voluntary sample collected by an Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) biologist when they bring harvested deer to mandatory physical check stations.
  - New for 2026 - IDNR offers voluntary mail-in sampling kits to hunters who want a convenient way to have their deer tested. Hunters simply collect lymph node samples and mail them in.
  - The Illinois Department of Agriculture oversees the CWD certification program within Illinois. This program provides the requirements for keeping and moving farm-raised cervids. This includes registration, recordkeeping, disease testing, movement, and permit requirements.

Management

- Research has shown that removing more deer in areas with CWD can help keep prevalence low.
- A Special Late Winter CWD deer season was developed to increase deer harvest in counties where CWD is detected.
- Firearm deer permit quotas were greatly increased for all deer seasons in CWD counties.
- Public Act – 104-0059 authorizes the issuance of free deer permits to landowners with at least 20 acres in a county where the IDNR has positively identified chronic wasting disease cases in the deer herd.
- Active CWD management kept prevalence low (below 2%) and confined to northern Illinois for 17 years. Around 2019 disease prevalence started to climb, reaching 9.3 percent in 2025 and spread to counties in central Illinois. ***Sharpshooting was suspended in 2026.***

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How can hunters and landowners continue to act as agents for Illinois' deer and combat Chronic Wasting Disease?

- Continue to hunt and harvest deer.
- Encourage deer hunting on private property.
- Increase the number of deer taken – particularly antlerless deer – in and around areas with CWD. This may require some creativity, such as inviting more people to hunt or selecting certain seasons to focus on antlerless harvest.
- Having harvested deer tested for CWD.

Is it safe to consume venison from a CWD positive deer?

Currently, there is no scientific evidence that CWD is transmissible through consumption of meat from an infected animal, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, "If your animal tests positive for CWD, do not eat meat from that animal." Experts suggest that hunters take simple, common-sense precautions when field dressing deer:

- Wear rubber gloves when field dressing carcasses.
- Bone out the meat from your animal.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed.
- Avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals. (Normal field dressing coupled with boning out of a carcass will remove essentially all of these parts.)



Request your CWD Mail-In Kit!

huntillinois.org/cwd-sampling/#cwd-mail-in-testing-kits

** Sample collection must be limited to yearling and adult deer harvested in Illinois. Fawns and deer harvested out of state will not be tested. Mail-in kits and diagnostic testing services are free of charge and test results will be posted online when available (see code below).*

Check the status of your Chronic Wasting Disease Test results

dnr2.illinois.gov/DNRDirectMonitor/CWD/CWDCaseDetailSearch.aspx