

Most deer hunters are well aware of the presence of chronic wasting disease, or CWD, in the Wisconsin wild deer population. Another concern is the contamination of venison caused by the use of lead ammunition. Both have the potential of posing a health threat to humans. We offer these guidelines for field-dressing deer and cutting and processing venison to minimize possible exposure and protect human health.

CWD

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a slow and progressive transmissible neurological disease of deer, elk and moose caused by an abnormal infectious protein, or prion, which produces small lesions in the brains of infected animals. According to the Centers for Disease Control, no human cases of prion disease with strong evidence of a link with CWD have been identified. However, the transmission of BSE to humans and the resulting variant form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease indicate that, provided sufficient exposure, the species barrier may not completely protect humans from animal prion diseases. As a result, many hunters still prefer to take extra precautions to remove materials that could contain prions from venison.

Lead

Lead is known to damage the brain and central nervous system, especially in young children and pregnant women. It does not always cause outward signs of illness in humans. The risk depends on the amount and frequency of venison consumption. Although no one has linked human health effects to lead in venison, the amount found in some samples suggests that lead poisoning could occur in people who regularly eat venison shot with lead ammunition. Some of the lead bullet fragments found in venison samples have been far from the wound channel and were too small to see during processing.

More Information

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection
datcp.wi.gov

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
dnr.wi.gov

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
dhs.wi.gov

For a map of the CWD Management Zone, visit
dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/regulations.html



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Safe Venison Handling to Prevent Illness or Injury



Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

General precautions

- Do not eat the eyes, brain, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils or lymph nodes of any deer. (See diagram)
- If the deer appeared sick at the time of harvest, do not eat any part of that deer. Dispose of the deer carcass appropriately.
- If your deer is sampled for CWD testing, wait for the test results before eating the meat. If the CWD test is positive, do not consume any part of that deer. Dispose of the carcass appropriately.
- Wear rubber or latex gloves when working with a deer carcass.

Field dressing

- Wearing rubber or latex gloves is recommended, but not required.
- Minimize contact with the brain, spinal cord, spleen and lymph nodes (lumps of tissue next to organs or in fat and membranes) as you work.
- Use knives or utensils dedicated to hunting. Avoid using household knives or utensils. But if you must use household knives or utensils, be sure to clean and sanitize them with a 50/50 solution of household chlorine bleach and water.
- Remove all internal organs.

Cutting and processing

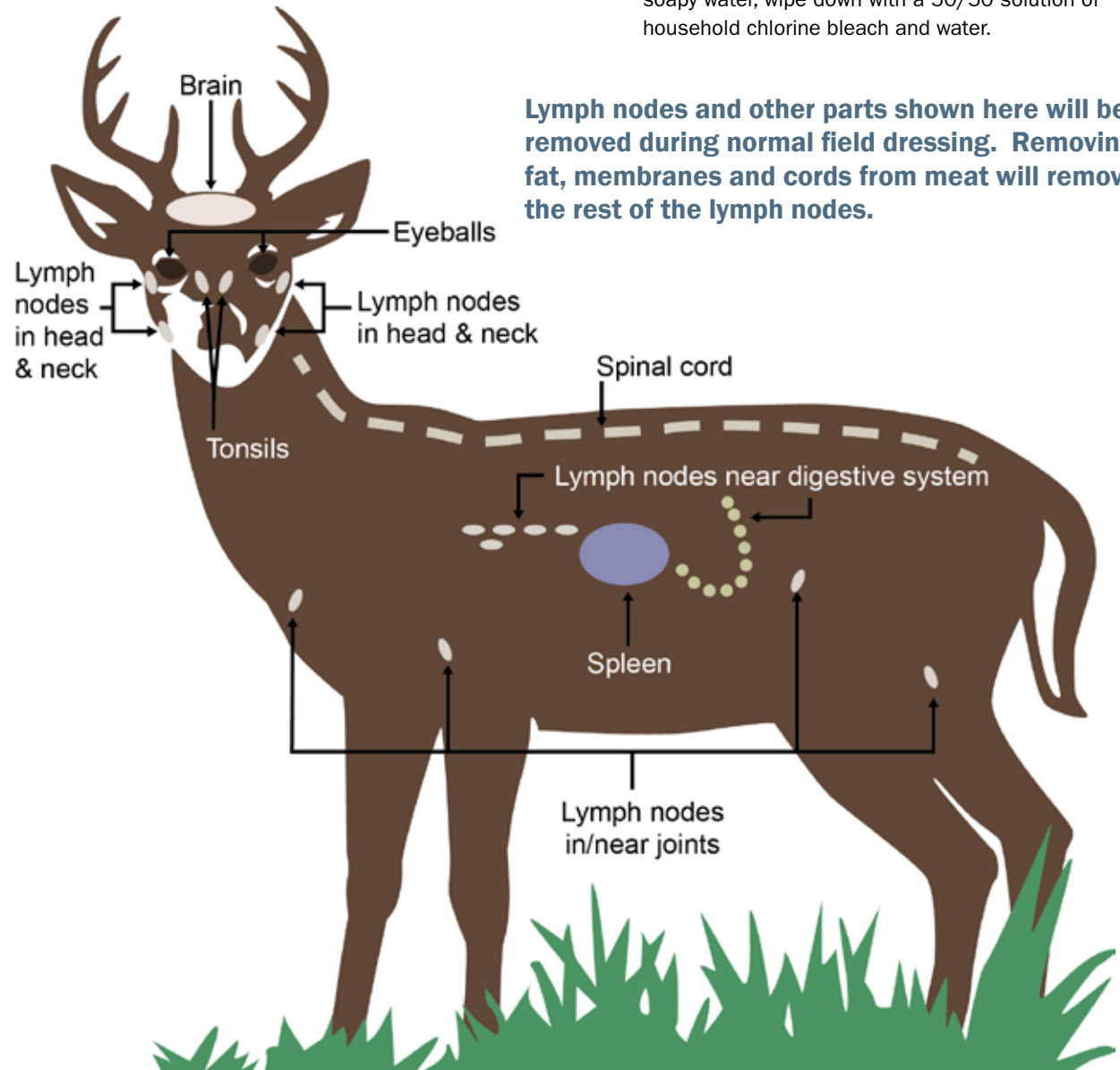
- Wearing rubber or latex gloves is recommended, but not required.
- If processing more than one deer from the CWD management zone, keep meat and trimmings from each deer separate.
- Minimize handling brain or spinal tissues. If removing antlers, use a saw designated for that purpose only, and dispose of the blade.
- Do not cut through the spinal column except to remove the head. Use a knife designated only for this purpose.
- Bone out the meat from the deer and remove all fat and connective tissue, web-like membranes attached to the meat. This will also remove lymph nodes.

If you use lead ammunition:

- When you select venison for grinding, do not use meat with excessive shot damage.
- Trim a generous distance away from the bullet wound channel, beyond what has been common practice.
- Process small batches so you can frequently check the grinder and remove lead fragments.
- Discard any meat that is bruised, discolored or contains hair, dirt, bone fragments or grass.

Clean-up

- Dispose of hide, brain and spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils, bones and head in a landfill or by other means available in your area.
- Clean knives and equipment of residue with soapy water and disinfect by soaking them for an hour in a 50/50 solution of household chlorine bleach and water.
- After cleaning counters and other surfaces with soapy water, wipe down with a 50/50 solution of household chlorine bleach and water.



Lymph nodes and other parts shown here will be removed during normal field dressing. Removing fat, membranes and cords from meat will remove the rest of the lymph nodes.