

Chronic Wasting Disease Symposium in Colorado, USA

Over 500 delegates attended the US National Chronic Wasting Disease Symposium held in August in Denver, Colorado. The symposium was an opportunity for researchers to review current knowledge, present the latest research findings and for state and federal officials to disseminate information on the distribution of the disease, and control and surveillance programs.

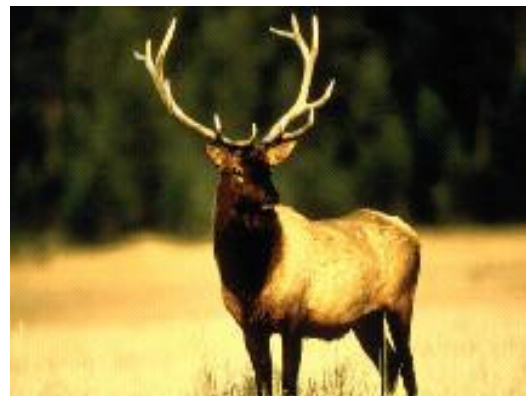
Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) of cervids. Most affected animals are between 3 and 7 years of age, although the disease has been seen in animals as young as 17 months and as old as 15 years. The clinical duration of the disease can be days to over a year, with most animals dying within a few weeks to months.

Affected animals lose condition because of a reduction in food intake, and may show repetitive behaviour, subtle ataxia, a wide-based stance and subtle head tremors. They may carry their head and ears lowered, show periods of depression, and be found near water sources. Excessive salivation, drinking and urination are common in the terminal stages. Death is inevitable. Aspiration pneumonia is a common finding postmortem, presumably due to difficulty swallowing, hypersalivation, and inhalation of foreign material into the lungs. This may lead to misdiagnosis if the brain is not examined.



Clinical disease is often more subtle and prolonged in elk than in deer. Sudden death and death by misadventure have also been reported.

CWD has been reported in mule deer, white tail deer and elk in the US and Canada, and has been detected in South Korea in an imported elk. Elk from a herd subsequently found to be infected with CWD have also been imported into New Zealand from Canada and these animals have been the primary focus of surveillance investigations, all of which have been negative for CWD. New Zealand suspended all imports of live deer, semen and embryos from Canada in 1998.



The transmission of BSE to humans in the form of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease has created concern about the potential public health risks of other animal TSEs. The symposium spent time discussing the potential for the transmission of CWD to humans and other species. There is, to date, no evidence of natural transmission to species other than deer and elk and no evidence of zoonotic transmission of CWD.

New Zealand has the world's largest deer farming industry. The increasing media attention on TSEs and the international spread of CWD has the potential to impact on our trading markets.

Since January 1990, New Zealand has maintained a continuous CWD surveillance programme to reinforce international acceptance of our CWD-free status by demonstrating that we are investigating possible cases and ruling out disease. MAF provides financial incentives to encourage laboratory submissions by veterinary practitioners of brains from all deer species that are 2 years of age or older exhibiting non-responsive ill-thrift, neurological disease, or acute pneumonia. In order to provide increased evidence of New Zealand's

CWD-free status, MAF, in consultation with the deer industry, has launched a programme to raise awareness of the clinical signs of CWD and increase the number of brains submitted for laboratory examination.

Abstracts from the symposium are to be posted on the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance web site (<http://www.cwd-info.org>).

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