

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease in White-tailed Deer

Frequently Asked Questions



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

- **What is Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease?**

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease, or EHD, is a viral disease that affects deer. In New York, it is usually fatal, with deer dying in 8 to 36 hours.

- **Can people get EHD?**

No, it only affects deer.

- **What are the signs of EHD?**

Common signs of EHD in deer are swelling of the head, neck, tongue and lips; loss of appetite; weakness; and loss of fear of people. Deer that die of EHD are often found in and around water.

- **How do deer get EHD?**

The disease is caused by a virus that is transmitted by the bite of tiny biting flies called midges, gnats, or “no-see-ums.” Deer cannot transmit EHD to each other.

- **Why have I never heard of this disease before?**

EHD was first diagnosed in New York State in 2007 and has occurred in multiple counties in the state since, with a recent widespread outbreak in 2021. It typically lasts for a short period of time beginning in the late summer or early fall when the midges appear. The infected midges are killed during the first few hard frosts which will effectively end the outbreak.

- **Is there any treatment for infected deer?**

No, there is no treatment for EHD. In the southern states, where EHD occurs more often, deer can develop immunity to the disease.

- **How will this disease affect deer populations?**

While this disease can result in a significant number of deer deaths, it only occurs occasionally in New York State, so it does not have a significant long-term effect on deer populations.

- **Is it safe to consume the meat of an infected deer?**

Although EHD virus does not infect humans, hunters should not shoot, handle, or eat deer that appear sick or are acting abnormally. Do not handle or eat any deer that is found dead, as deer that die from EHD seem to decompose considerably faster than hunter-killed deer and there is an increased risk of bacterial meat spoilage. In general, hunters should always wear rubber gloves when field-dressing or butchering deer or other wild game and all wild game meat should be cooked thoroughly. Remember, deer are occasionally infected with rabies virus so eating deer found dead, acting sick, or acting abnormally is never a good idea.

- **What if the deer is infected but still acting normal and looks fine? Can it safely be eaten?**

If a deer in the early stages of infection that looks and behaves normally is shot and promptly field-dressed, it would be less likely to spoil quickly and would be safe to eat.

- **What should I do if I see a deer that appears sick or is found dead from unknown causes?**

Please report any sick or dead deer to the nearest Regional DEC Wildlife Office or Environmental Conservation Officer. Additionally, DEC has set up an online reporting form for deer suspected to be sick with or have died from EHD (<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/6c0603ce13444102be6858bc7dd577e9>).

For any questions or additional information, please contact Wildlife Biologist Jesse Jaycox at Jesse.Jaycox@parks.ny.gov or 518-473-4776.