



NATIVE AMERICAN FISH & WILDLIFE SOCIETY

10465 Melody Dr. Ste. 307, Northglenn, CO 80234

1-866-890-7258, (303)466-1725

www.nafws.org

PRESS RELEASE

White-tailed Deer Test Positive for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

Tribal fish and wildlife risk reduction strategies



Big game hunter near Belfry, Montana. *Photo by Sean Cross.*

A team of researchers out of Pennsylvania State University have confirmed the ability of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to infect white-tailed deer (Kuchipudi et al., 2021). High rates of infection in deer populations indicate that deer-to-deer transmission is likely. However, as a respiratory disease, opportunities for transfer from wild deer to humans are limited by a lack of close contact and as of now there is no evidence this has occurred. Still, Tribal Fish & Wildlife Departments must consider the spread of COVID-19 among deer and other wildlife populations.

The presence of SARS-CoV-2 in deer highlights the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and your human and animal neighbors.

How to reduce risk

Despite the low risk of COVID spread from wildlife to humans, there are proactive steps you can take to reduce your risk and to avoid infecting local wildlife populations. Many of these steps will also minimize risks of exposure to and spread of other wildlife diseases (e.g., chronic wasting disease).

- Do not feed wildlife or touch droppings
- Do not approach or touch a sick or dead animal
- Do not allow contact between wildlife and pets
- **Get vaccinated.** The highest risk of infection is still other people, especially unvaccinated people. Vaccinations protect you, your community, and local wildlife.

Additional Considerations for Hunters

The greatest increases of COVID in deer coincided with the peak of deer hunting season last year (Kuchipudi et al., 2021). Hunters encounter wildlife more than others and therefore should take extra precautions, including:

While hunting:

- Avoid approaching an animal until dead, wear a mask if approaching a dying animal
- Do not harvest animals that appear sick or are found dead
- If you are immunocompromised, consider asking for help with processing and handling

Field Dressing

- Do not eat, drink, or use tobacco products while handling and dressing game
- Wear gloves and eye protection while field dressing your harvest
- Contact with backbone, spinal tissues, brain tissues and lymph nodes may increase exposure risk. Limit cutting through the spine and use extra precautions to avoid lymph nodes (small white bean-like structure) (See figure 1 & 2) which concentrate viruses and contaminants
- Thoroughly disinfect your tools

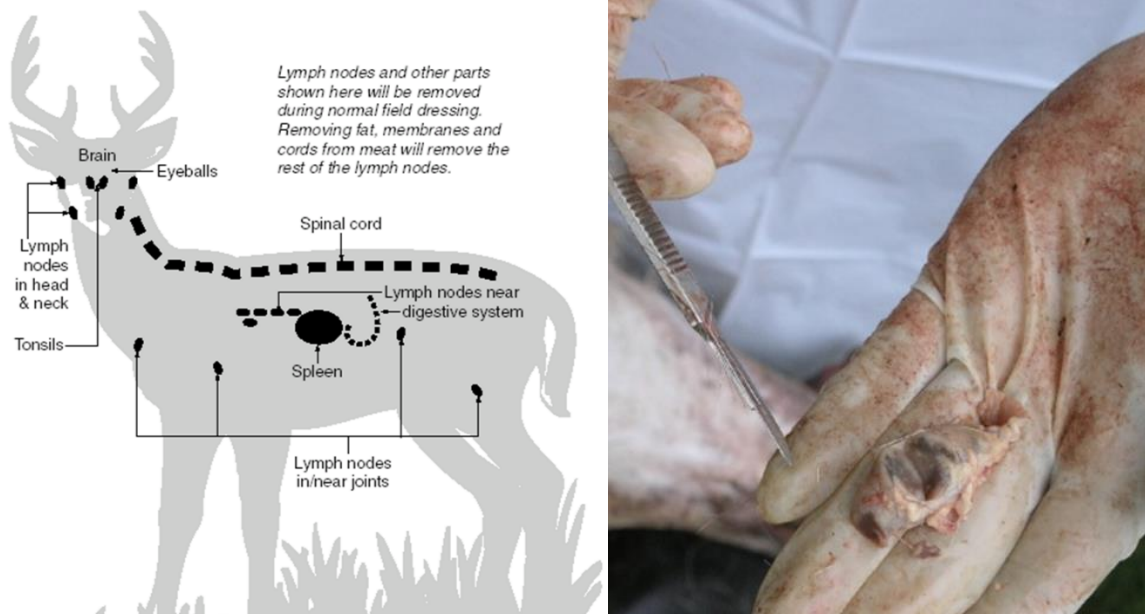


Figure 1 (left)1: During normal field dressing, lymph nodes will be removed. Take extra precautions in the fore and hind limb armpits, head, neck, and digestive system to avoid contact with the lymph nodes.

Figure 2 (Right): Lymph node removed from an elk. Photo by Corey Lucero.

Meat and hide preparation

- Keep game meat clean and cool it down as soon as possible
- Cook game meat at 165 degrees or higher
- Wear gloves and eye protection while brain tanning
- Check with your local wildlife agency regarding any testing requirements for other diseases and for any specific instructions regarding preparing, transporting, and consuming game meat.

Conclusion

By taking simple steps to reduce risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19, we can protect human and animal communities. Contact your local wildlife agency for updates and recommended precautionary measures. If you become sick following a hunt or contact with an animal, inform your physician that you may have been exposed to an infected animal.

As we learn more recommendations may change. For more information on risk reduction visit: [Guidance to Reduce the Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Spreading between People and Wildlife \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/wildlife/healthypets/covid-19/guidance-to-reduce-the-risk-of-sars-cov-2-spreading-between-people-and-wildlife/).

For updates from NAFWS visit www.nafws.org
Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

Sources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, October 18). *Guidance to reduce the risk of SARS-COV-2 spreading between people and Wildlife*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/covid-19/wildlife.html>.
- Kuchipudi, Suresh V, et al. "Multiple Spillovers and Onward Transmission of SARS-COV-2 in Free-Living and Captive White-Tailed Deer." 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.10.31.466677>.
- LaJeunesse, Sara. "Deer May Be Reservoir for SARS-COV-2, Study Finds." *Penn State University*, Penn State News, <https://www.psu.edu/news/research/story/deer-may-be-reservoir-sars-cov-2-study-finds>.
- Covid-19: Staying safe in your community. Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (2021, November 17). Retrieved November 22, 2021, from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/community.htm>.
- "Deer Hunters Advised to Take Routine Precautions." *Pennsylvania Pressroom*, <https://www.media.pa.gov/pages/game-commission-details.aspx?newsid=492>.