



Wildlife & human health in Alberta

Health Risks ?

By far, the majority of individual fishes and wildlife in Alberta are healthy and it is rare to see sick or dying animals naturally in the wild. Although healthy, most wildlife carry other animals [parasites and disease agents] that live in their tissues and organs, or live in or on their hair, feathers, and scales. The majority of these animals do not pose any human health concern and, with proper handling and hand-washing, even these low risks can be further reduced.

General Precautions

Although human health risks associated with fishes and wildlife in Alberta are low, it is always good to wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly after handling a wild animal, particularly if it was found dead. If fevers, swellings, or pain occur after handling wildlife, always contact a physician and be sure to tell them about your activities with wildlife.

What to do if you find a dead or sick wild animal

Wildlife that die of natural causes are an important food source for the ecosystem and contribute essential nutrients to nourish the web of life. Most individual carcasses can be left alone.

Anyone who finds a sick wild animal can call any local Fish and Wildlife office. Office contact numbers are in the blue pages of local phone directories, on the government website, or avail-

able from the government telephone switchboard toll-free at 310-0000.

If you find something unusual in harvested big game, tag the carcass, dress it out, and handle it so the meat does not spoil. If you find something unusual in game birds, waterfowl or fish, freeze the entire animal. Take pictures, if possible.

Call a Fish and Wildlife office and describe what you have seen. Often an officer or wildlife biologist will know what it is and can answer any questions. Or you can remove the tissue of concern and take it, or the entire carcass, to any Fish and Wildlife office.

When storing or transporting samples or found dead wildlife, use strong plastic bags or double bag the material. Keep the tissues cool, or freeze them if you cannot get to an office within a day or two. Avoid sharp beaks, toes, or bones that may puncture the bag or scratch you. Clearly label the sample and include the date, location, species, and reason for concern. Include pictures if you have them. Also, provide a contact address or phone number if you would like follow-up information.



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Fact Sheets

The Fish and Wildlife Division has a series of fact sheets that present information about common wildlife parasites and diseases in Alberta. For a list of topics visit srd.alberta.ca then search for "Wildlife Diseases". Those parasites and diseases associated with potential human health concerns are identified, and the related fact sheets provide appropriate precautions to avoid infection.

Paper copies of the fact sheets can be obtained from any Fish and Wildlife office.

Surveillance programs

From time to time the province undertakes specific projects to inform hunters and program managers about the occurrence, distribution, and possible management of particular parasites and diseases in wild species. These projects often start with a request for the public to provide samples for testing. This is by far the most efficient and effective way to get samples for disease surveillance purposes. It has been our experience that when asked, hunters and fishermen are more than willing to provide whatever is needed, including the data that must always accompany such samples.

Chronic Wasting Disease

The province has monitored the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) into Alberta since 1998. In specific risk areas of the province, generally along the eastern border with Saskatchewan, recreational hunters are required to submit the head of deer and elk harvested in specified Wildlife Management Units (WMUs). Aboriginal hunters also are encouraged to submit suitable samples. More information regarding CWD and our CWD programs is available at the web site listed at the bottom of this page.

While there is no known human health risk associated with CWD, hunters may choose to take precautions when handling harvested deer.



Summary

Very few human health risks are present in fishes and wildlife in Alberta. Careful handling of wild game and thorough washing, cooking, and freezing also reduces the risk of human infection. Anyone who finds something that looks unusual in harvested fish or wildlife can contact our Fish and Wildlife offices for information.

Additional Information

BC Wildlife Branch booklet "Diseases you can get from Wildlife": visit www.env.gov.bc.ca then search for "Wildlife Health"

Public Health Agency of Canada: visit www.publichealth.gc.ca then search for "Foodborne, Waterborne and Zoonotic Infections"

For more information on wildlife diseases in Alberta, visit the Sustainable Resource Development website srd.alberta.ca then search for "Wildlife Diseases"