

# Wisconsin Department of Health Services: Enjoy wild game safely this season

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CONTACT: Jennifer Miller, 608-266-1683,  
Elizabeth Goodsitt, 608-266-1683

State health officials are reminding hunters, their families, and anyone who serves or eats wild game to make sure the meat is cooked thoroughly before eating. Last year, an outbreak of [trichinellosis](#) (trichinosis), a disease people can get by eating raw or undercooked meat from animals infected with the microscopic parasite, *Trichinella*, sickened three Wisconsin residents. The outbreak was associated with eating undercooked bear meat. *Trichinella* is found worldwide in a wide range of birds and mammals, including grizzly bears, black bears, and wild hogs.

“Wild game is frequently exposed to parasites and bacteria that can make people sick if the meat isn’t cooked thoroughly or if precautions are not taken when the meat is prepared in the kitchen,” said State Health Officer Karen McKeown.

Symptoms of trichinellosis include nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, fatigue, fever, and abdominal cramps that begin 1-2 days after infection. Within two to eight weeks, people may experience muscle and joint pain, swelling of the face and around the eyes, fevers, chills, cough, headaches, itchy skin, or diarrhea. In severe cases, people can develop heart and breathing problems and even die. Symptoms can last for months and the illness may be mistaken for influenza or other common illnesses.

Trichinellosis can be prevented by properly cooking all whole cuts and ground meat from wild game animals to an internal temperature of 160°F. Freezing the meat in your freezer, smoking, or curing game meat does not kill all species of the *Trichinella* parasite. Any waterfowl meat should be cooked to an internal

temperature of 165°F. DHS recommends a meat thermometer be used to measure meat temperatures because color is not a reliable indicator of doneness (temperature) in game animals.

In addition to trichinellosis, consuming raw or undercooked wild game meat can result in several other illnesses, including salmonellosis and E. coli infections. Hunters can become ill with salmonellosis or E. coli infections after accidentally ingesting intestinal contents while processing or butchering wild game or if wild game is not cooked thoroughly.

- Wisconsin hunters are encouraged to practice routine good hygiene when handling, cleaning and cooking wild game. The Department of Health Services recommends the following:  
Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game.  
Wash hands with soap and water and thoroughly clean knives, equipment and surfaces (including tables and cutting boards) that come into contact with game.  
Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling or cleaning wild fowl or game.  
Do not handle or eat game or fowl that appeared ill before being killed.  
Persons who become ill after consuming wild game should contact their health care provider and let the doctor know that they have consumed wild game.

DHS also encourages hunters who harvest deer in areas of the state where Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is known to exist to have the deer tested for CWD. Details are available in The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) [Deer Hunting Guidelines](#) (link is external). DHS also discourages the consumption of meat from deer harvested anywhere that showed signs of illness, for example, deer that appeared emaciated or that acted abnormally.

Additional information about disease risks and hunters is available from [The American Veterinary Medical Association](#) (link is external).