

Bovine Tuberculosis



What is bovine TB?

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) is a highly infectious disease that is capable of infecting most mammalian species. Bovine TB has been found in wild white-tailed deer and other wildlife in Indiana, Michigan and some other states. TB has NOT been detected in Ohio deer.

How does this disease occur?

Deer may become infected by direct contact from respiratory secretions between uninfected and infected animals. Transmission is more common when animals are in close proximity to one another. TB can also persist in the environment from 18 to 332 days in 54-75°F temperatures; however, it is difficult to isolate TB from pastures where infected animals have grazed.



What does this disease do to deer?

Tuberculosis is a chronic, progressive and fatal disease to deer that causes weight loss, coughing, labored breathing, and enlarged or draining lymph nodes. Affected animals often look and act normally early in the course of the disease. A person may see small, firm lumps, or sometimes pus filled abscesses, located inside of the chest cavity, on the lungs, or in the abdominal cavity in an infected deer. Earlier in the disease process, these lumps may be smaller and few in number, and could go undetected.

What should hunters do if they encounter suspicious looking lesions while field dressing a deer?

If you notice something suspicious in the body cavity of a deer you are field dressing, contact the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industry at 614-728-6220 immediately. Consult your physician, if you have questions concerning your health.

What should hunters do if they see a live deer that appears to be sick?

Hunters who see deer that appear to be sick or are displaying abnormal behavior should advise the landowner and either the hunter or the landowner should immediately report the occurrence to your [District Wildlife Office](#). The person reporting the animal should describe both the location of the animal and its symptoms and behavior. Hunters should not kill or handle a deer that they believe is sick.

Can people contract the bovine form of TB?

It can infect humans but it is rare in the United States. TB infection in people is a treatable disease. Most human tuberculosis is caused by a different type of tuberculosis that is spread from person to person and rarely infects animals. The United States has actively pursued a bovine tuberculosis eradication program since 1917. This program, together with food safety initiatives, has been very effective in reducing the likelihood of people contracting the bovine form of tuberculosis.

Should hunters take precautions in handling deer or deer meat?

Hunters should take some common-sense precautions, such as not harvesting deer that appear sick or otherwise abnormal, wearing rubber gloves while field dressing and processing deer, and avoiding handling or eating deer brain, spinal cord, spleen or lymph nodes. If a TB infected deer were inadvertently consumed, normal cooking temperatures will effectively destroy the organism. Hunters should also follow the Division of Wildlife's [deer carcass disposal regulations](#).

