Adopted July 16, 2020

CCVO Council of Chief Veterinary Officers

CMVC Conseil des Médecins Vétérinaires en Chef

Position Statement: Restocking of premises with new cervids following detection of chronic wasting disease in a farmed cervid herd.

The Council of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCVO) provides veterinary leadership to Canadian animal health and welfare networks on key and emerging issues and serves the public interest by providing strategic direction on animal health and welfare in Canada through scientific assessment, information sharing, and consensus building across governments.

Position

The CCVO recommends that all federal, provincial, and territorial authorities explore and pursue the development of legislation, programs, and/or policies that support restricting or prohibiting restocking with cervid animals on cervid farms that have experienced previous case(s) of CWD, especially situations in which environmental contamination with prions likely occurred.

Background

1. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) represents a serious threat to free-ranging and farmed cervids and their associated economies.
2. It is a disease of national importance with concerns regarding animal health, wildlife population sustainability, and food safety and security, particularly for rural Canadians, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.
3. The disease continues to be detected in farmed cervids and the prevalence of CWD in the wild continues to increase.
4. CWD prions capable of causing infection in cervids can be found in meat, blood, saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces, and semen of infected cervid animals.
5. Infected animals likely shed prions during much of the infection, which can be prolonged in many cases.
6. Various risk factors can be used to determine the extent that prion shedding has occurred on a property including the number of animals testing positive, evidence of multiple animals at various stages of histopathologic disease, animals with clinical signs and/or late stage histopathologic disease, and presence of cervids that have died in the terminal stage of the disease.

7. Contaminated fomites and feed/forages may also serve as an indirect way to introduce and spread prions into an environment. Standing water bodies may also serve as an environmental reservoir if prions from infected animals are shed in sufficient quantity to become infectious.
8. Experimental research has found that prions can bind to soil, remain infectious, and upon exposure to certain soil types (e.g. clay), have enhanced persistence and infectivity.
9. Additional lab-based research has demonstrated that grass plants can bind prions from exposure on the surface and uptake prions from contaminated soil.
10. Introducing cervids into a contaminated environment will likely result in establishment of infection within a portion of that new population.
11. Translocation of live cervids incubating the disease represents a significant risk to introducing the disease to a new geographic region.
12. Recent ongoing, non-peer reviewed studies, suggest that oral consumption of muscle tissue from an infected cervid can result in disease transmission to macaque monkeys, which has raised concerns about potential human health implications.
13. Health Canada and other health authorities recommend testing cervids harvested from enzootic areas prior to consumption and not allowing meat from positive animals to be used for human consumption, based on the precautionary principle.
14. There may be specific situations such as terminal hunt farms in enzootic regions, where consideration of exceptions to this position may apply.