



### **SARS-CoV-2 in White-tailed Deer**

SARS-CoV-2 is the causative agent of Covid-19 in humans. Covid-19 is transmitted through close contact with infected persons. The CDC has found that there are several domestic and wild animal species that are susceptible to SARS-CoV-2, including white-tailed deer and mink.

A study done by the USDA and Cornell University found that it was possible for white-tailed deer to become infected with Covid-19. A later study published by the USDA then discovered that one third of samples collected from free ranging deer populations in Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania had SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. This means that these deer were exposed to SARS-CoV-2, which is why their immune system produced antibodies. It is unknown how these animals came into contact with the virus. It is theorized that they were exposed from other deer or animals, people, or the environment.

According to the CDC, there is currently no evidence that suggests animals are contributing to the spread of SARS-CoV-2. The current risk of humans contracting covid-19 from wildlife is very low and there is no evidence that suggests people can contract covid-19 from preparing and eating hunted game meat. Although, it is still important to take precautions for both human and wildlife health and safety.

Hunters are always encouraged to use good hygiene practices when processing animals to reduce their risk of exposure to many possible disease agents. Incorporating a few additional measures can also help to reduce their risk of possible exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

- Do not harvest animals that appear sick or are found dead.
- Keep the carcass and meat clean. Cool the meat as soon as possible after harvesting the animal.
- When handling and cleaning the carcass:
  - Wear rubber or disposable gloves.
  - Wear a mask.
  - Do not eat, drink, or smoke.
- Limit cutting into and handling the spinal cord, brain, lungs, throat, and mouth/nasal cavity to only what is necessary.
- When finished handling the carcass:
  - Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.
  - Wash all knives, equipment, and surfaces that were in contact with the carcass with soap and water and use a disinfectant, such as bleach.
- If you are immunocompromised, consider asking for assistance with carcass processing and handling.
- Cook all game meat thoroughly (to an internal temperature of 165°F or higher).

## **Additional Information**

[SARS-CoV-2 and Wildlife Update | Cornell Wildlife Health Lab](#)

[NJDEP| Fish & Wildlife | White-Tailed Deer and COVID-19: What Hunters Need to Know 2021.07.29.454326v1.full.pdf \(biorxiv.org\)](#)

[Guidance to Reduce the Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Spreading between People and Wildlife \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Questions and Answers: Results of Study on SARS-CoV2 in White-Tailed Deer \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Animals and COVID-19 | CDC](#)

[Animals and Plants | USDA](#)

[Animal Health & Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) | FDA](#)

[COVID-19 - WOAHP - World Organization for Animal Health](#)

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