

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) Addressing Hunter Concerns Updated September 2020

EEE background

Eastern Equine Encephalitis is a rare disease that is caused by a virus spread by infected mosquitoes. It is one of the most serious mosquito-borne diseases in the United States. Severe cases of EEE infection begin with the sudden onset of headache, high fever, chills and vomiting. The illness may then progress into disorientation, seizures and coma. Approximately a third of people who develop EEE illness die, and many of those who survive have mild to severe brain damage. In the United States, approximately 5-10 EEE cases are reported annually in people.

EEE is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. Disease transmission does not occur directly from person to person or animal to person. Anyone in an area where the virus is circulating can get infected with EEE. The risk is highest for people who live in or visit woodland habitats, and people who work outside or participate in outdoor recreational activities, because of greater exposure to potentially infected mosquitoes. Those who are over 50 years old and under 15 years old are at increased risk of developing severe disease.

Hunter guidance

The greatest risk from Eastern Equine Encephalitis that hunters face is exposure to mosquitoes, not handling or consuming normal appearing deer from affected counties. Hunters are encouraged to check the [Michigan Emerging Disease Issues website](#), which is regularly updated, for a map of counties reporting EEE activity in Michigan. In counties where EEE activity is occurring, hunters should take precautions to minimize their risk for mosquito bites by:

- Staying indoors between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wearing long sleeves and pants to limit exposed skin.
- Wearing an effective mosquito repellent when outdoors.

Although many species of animals including deer and horses can become ill with EEE, there is no evidence that people can become infected from eating infected meat. Nonetheless, hunters can avoid any potential risk by taking the following common-sense precautions:

- Don't handle or consume wild animals that appear sick or act abnormally.
- Wear gloves and safety glasses when handling, field-dressing and processing game.
- Handle knives carefully to prevent accidental cuts.

- Cook deer meat thoroughly (at least 160 degrees, [according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)).
- Minimize contact with a deer's brain or spinal tissues. Do not cut into the head of any deer that behaved abnormally, even to remove the rack. When removing antlers from healthy deer, use a hand saw rather than a power saw, and always wear safety glasses.
- Bone out the carcass, keeping both the head and spine intact.
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling carcasses and before and after handling meat.
- Thoroughly sanitize equipment and work surfaces used during processing with a bleach solution (1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 gallon water). Consider keeping a separate set of knives used only for butchering deer.

Anyone observing a deer that is obviously sick and behaving abnormally should contact the closest [DNR office](#) during business hours, use [the DNR's Eyes in the Field Web application](#), or contact the DNR Report All Poaching (RAP) Line after 5 p.m. and on weekends to help us continue to monitor EEE. The DNR RAP Line is available 24 hours a day at 1-800-292-7800.