



News Release

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Wild game meat: safe food-handling guidance for Washington hunters

OLYMPIA — Hunters in our state should be ready to handle and prepare wild game meat properly as big game season approaches. Many animal diseases can be passed to people if proper food safety precautions aren't followed.

“After you harvest wild game, it becomes food and must be treated with the same care as other meat,” said State Health Officer Dr. Kathy Lofy. “It’s important that hunters learn and follow recommendations to properly handle harvested animals – from the field to the fork – to make sure wild game meat doesn’t cause food-borne illnesses.”

In contrast to domestically-raised animals, wild game animals don’t receive veterinary care. The meat is not inspected before or after harvest, and processing starts in the field.

There are important steps hunters can take to ensure the food they bring home is as safe as it can be. Don’t harvest, handle, or eat visibly sick animals. Wild game meat should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees. Other [food safety guidelines for hunters](#), as well as tips for proper field dressing, transport, preparation, and storage, are available online.

Elk hoof disease in two southwest Washington herds has raised questions about the safety of the meat. Affected elk have malformed hooves from a bacterial disease, but officials from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the state health department agree the meat isn’t affected by the disease and poses no health risk to people if handled properly.

To help minimize the spread of the disease, WDFW requires hunters in southwest Washington leave on-site the hooves of any elk they harvest. [More information on elk hoof disease](#) is online.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for a healthy dose of information. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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