

# Blood test needed for deer, elk disease

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The deer and elk form of mad cow disease is far more widespread than scientists feared and there urgently needs to be a blood test for the infection to protect people who want to eat those animals, according to an American expert who spoke in Banff on Tuesday.

"We still don't know with any level of certainty if it infects humans," said Philip Bochslar, chief of pathology and toxicology at the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. Bochslar was speaking at the American College of Veterinary Pathologists meeting at the Fairmont Banff Springs hotel.

"We don't know, and if you don't know,

## Wasting disease

■ The following have reported chronic wasting disease in wild cervids:

Saskatchewan, Colorado, Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming

■ The following have also reported CWD in captive cervids: Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Wyoming

you have to use some level of caution," he said.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) affects deer and elk in the same way mad cow disease affects cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease affects humans — misshapen proteins cause victims' brains to deteriorate.

So far, the only way to

detect CWD in elk is to test the brains and certain lymph nodes after death.

CWD was first identified in Colorado in 1967 in captive deer. In the last few years, however, CWD has been discovered in domestic and/or wild herds of deer and elk, called cervids, across North America.

Three years ago, the disease was found in hundreds of farmed elk in Saskatchewan and in 12 wild deer. In Alberta, it has been found in one farmed elk and two farmed white-tailed deer.

Bochslar said scientists are not sure whether CWD is spreading or whether it's just being found more often because more tests are being done.

"It may have been there for 10 years or more, but no one was looking for it."

There are strong doubts, however, CWD can infect humans or even cattle, he said. Tests in the U.S. have shown cows living with infected captive cervids do not contract the disease. On the other hand, recent cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in Britain have been traced to a prior mad cow outbreak.

Bochslar said there needs to be a blood test for CWD because it will be several years before science can rule out the possibility of human infection.

"(While) it just doesn't appear to be very infectious in cattle or humans, it's fair to have some degree of caution," he said.