COVID-19 AND FOOD SAFETY

DEER HUNTING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Recent studies suggest high rates of COVID-19 infection in deer in the United States. Are deer hunters at an increased risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2?

DOES DEER HUNTING INCREASE RISK OF CONTRACTING COVID-19?

- The most widely referenced study evaluated deer for antibodies, which show that deer have been exposed to the virus. There is not significant evidence of active respiratory disease in deer.
- COVID-19 is not a blood-borne infection, so exposure to deer blood in hunting should pose little risk.
- Scientists do not currently believe deer are a significant cause of SARS-CoV-2 spread.

Deer and other wild game can be sources of microorganisms that cause severe illness, aside from COVID-19. Follow food safety best practices when handling and preparing deer.

BEST PRACTICES

- Although deer hunting does not pose a significant risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection, here are some best practices to minimize risk of COVID-19 and foodborne illness when hunting:
  - Wear a face covering when in close contact with a breathing deer
  - Wear gloves while field dressing
  - Wash hands thoroughly after hunting, handling any part of the deer carcass and/or handling raw meat
  - Keep raw meat and other carcass parts away from ready-to-eat food
  - Cook deer meat to a minimum internal temperature of 158°F

CAN EATING CONTAMINATED DEER MEAT CAUSE COVID-19?

- There are no documented cases of COVID-19 being contracted from food. There have been several instances at of person-to-person transmission at places where food is served or sold due especially when face coverings are not worn.
- No clusters of illnesses linked to food consumption or handling have been observed anywhere in the world. Epidemiologists and food safety professionals continue to look for links.
- The virus must contact cells containing a specific receptor that will allow entry into a cell and cause an infection. Inhaled moisture droplets are the primary way that the virus makes its way to respiratory cells and causes infection. The virus can be found in salivary glands, and has been recovered from fecal matter but these sources have led to clusters of infections.
- Scientists believe that infection through the digestive tract is not very common as stomach acid helps inactivate the virus.