

'Zombie deer disease' could make leap to humans, researchers say

Jeannine Fleegle [wildlife biologist] reached into a black garbage bag, pulled out a severed deer head, and placed it on a folding table smeared with blood and fur.

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The formal name of the ailment is chronic wasting disease, or CWD. But its effects on deer, elk and other cervids — weight loss, stumbling, listlessness and certain death — have inspired a creepier colloquial name: zombie deer disease.

More than half a century after it was first detected, the disease is now spreading rapidly. ... Now, as it strikes animals across a widening territory, concern is growing among scientists and public health officials that the disease might leap to humans.

CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy, another of which did jump species: mad cow disease. In humans, mad cow disease is known as variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and it has [killed more than 220 people](#) worldwide since the 1990s. Some experts say that in a nation with an [estimated](#) 10 million deer hunters harvesting 6 million deer a year and eating many of them, it may be just a matter of time before chronic wasting makes its way to us.

Both CWD and mad cow are thought to be caused by proteins that malfunction and misfold, called prions. [There is no known cure or treatment for prion diseases.](#)

Read full, original post: [A deadly deer disease is spreading. Could it strike people, too?](#)