

Q: Do deer die of DHLS?

A: Some infected deer will succumb to DHLS. Fawns and adult females are more likely to have DHLS than adult males, and infected fawns tend to have a higher mortality rate than infected adult females. Deer that survive will re-grow hair and gain weight during the summer. It is not known if deer that survive one year are more or less prone to being affected the next year.

Q: Are humans at risk if they eat the meat from an infected deer?

A: There are no known health risks to humans, predators or scavengers from eating meat from a deer infected with DHLS. However, experts recommend that anyone who plans to eat meat from an affected deer thoroughly cook the meat before eating it, as is the case with any meat product.

Q: Is DHLS contagious to children, pets or livestock?

A: There are no known cases of humans, pets or livestock becoming sick from contact with a deer displaying symptoms of DHLS. However, it is recommended that anyone who handles any dead animal carcass wear rubber gloves.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

- Toll-Free Number 800-720-6339 (ODFW)
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- Information and Education 503-947-6002
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**FAST FACTS ABOUT ...
DEER HAIR LOSS SYNDROME
RESEARCH**

Q: What is Deer Hair Loss Syndrome?

A: Deer Hair Loss Syndrome (DHLS) is called a syndrome, not a disease, because the cause and method of transmission are not completely understood. The syndrome is most common in black-tailed and Columbian white-tailed deer. Common symptoms include yellow or white appearing hair or bare patches of skin. At first, some deer have darkening or almost black patches of fur. Later, deer may appear emaciated and lethargic, and exhibit excessive loss of hair.

Q: What research is taking place to determine the causes and possible cures for DHLS?

A: Researchers from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State University are conducting a two-year study to learn more about the transmission of DHLS, its progression within individual deer, and its immunological effects. The study, which began in December 2003, uses pen-reared black-tailed deer collected in western Oregon and mule deer collected in eastern Oregon.

Q: Where is the research being conducted?

A: The study is being conducted in securely fenced enclosures located on the E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area. General public access to E.E. Wilson WLA will not be restricted while the research is taking place, but access to the study area will be limited to researchers and groups with prior approval.

Q: How is the research being funded?

A: Funding is being provided by several non-profit foundations and associations. No state tax dollars are being used for this research.

Q: What are the objectives of the DHLS research?

A: There are four specific research objectives:

1. Investigate transmission of lice from affected black-tailed deer to unaffected deer, and between black-tailed deer and mule deer. Animals will be monitored after infestation to record any clinical symptoms.
2. Quantify lice abundance and persistence in affected deer and positively identify the lice species. The abundance and persistence of lice on a host animal may be used to identify syndrome progression as well as symptomatic responses among animals. Lice samples will be sent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other experts for lice identification.
3. Determine the chronology of DHLS progression. Currently there is no chronological timeline for this syndrome. Researchers will establish a chronological record of disease progression for each captive deer. They will visually observe and record behavioral responses and physical appearances at two-week intervals.

4. Compare immune function between affected and non-affected deer at various stages of the syndrome. Study of the immune function and status of affected deer is important for understanding why deer are so severely impacted by organisms such as lice, which normally are associated with minimal disease or subclinical infections. Underlying immune suppression or compromise may be part of the reason.

Q: What will happen to the deer at the end of the study?

A: The deer will not be released back into the wild, but will be humanely euthanized. If possible, edible portions of meat will be provided to appropriate charitable organizations.

Q: What do we already know about how DHLS is transmitted?

A: At this point, researchers think the most probable source of transmission is deer to deer (nose to nose contact, parasite sharing or ground contact), air (sneezing) or water. Deer in poor health are more susceptible than healthy deer, which explains why some deer in a herd have DHLS and others do not.

Q: What causes deer to lose their hair?

A: While the cause of DHLS is not clearly understood, scientists do know that a key factor contributing to the loss of hair on deer is a hyper-sensitivity to lice commonly found on deer. Deer scratch, rub and chew on their hides in reaction to the lice infestation. This likely causes hair to fall out. In addition, these deer often have a heavy infestation of muscle worms that contribute to their sickness. Poor immune function also may be a contributing factor.

Q: Why is the research taking place?

A: Deer managers are increasingly concerned with the progression and spread of DHLS and its potential long-term effects on deer populations. To properly manage both the deer populations and hunting seasons, deer managers need more scientific information on DHLS.

Q: What effects have been seen on the deer population due to DHLS?

A: Based on declining hunter success rates, low fawn ratios, and public reports of dead deer, it appears that some areas of Oregon have had significant deer losses. If DHLS continues to affect more areas each year, deer populations may decline significantly throughout much of western Oregon. It is hoped that – as in the case of most other disease problems – deer will develop resistance over time and the problem will control itself. Biologists are hopeful that the problem eventually will decline to the point where deer populations recover to normal levels, but this is not a certain outcome.

Q: How prevalent is DHLS in Oregon's deer population?

A: DHLS has become more prevalent each year in Oregon since it was first documented in 1996. It currently affects deer in most areas of western Oregon below 1,500 feet in elevation and may spread within the next few years into those areas that have not yet been affected. It affects both black-tailed deer and Columbian white-tailed deer. It has not been confirmed in mule deer, although some mule deer have displayed similar hair loss symptoms.