

Lead in Venison

The use of lead bullets and slugs for hunting deer may cause lead particles to remain in the meat. A deer shot several times could have much more lead in it than one harvested by a single shot. The lead can break apart if it strikes bone or other hard tissue in the deer. This fact sheet provides answers to basic questions about how to reduce exposure to lead in venison.

Is exposure to lead in venison a public health hazard?

Although there is a potential for lead particles to remain in deer meat after processing, there is little evidence that exposure at these levels is great enough to cause adverse health effects. Still, we recommend that persons who process deer meat use certain techniques to reduce the potential for lead to be present in the venison. Hunters also can use non-lead ammunition to eliminate potential lead exposure from the processed meat.

What can processors do to reduce the level of lead in venison?

Processors of venison, whether professionals or private hunters, should continue to follow these common sense procedures to reduce the level of lead in the processed meat:

- Determine the path of the bullet or slug.
- Trim at least 4 inches, or more if needed, of tissue from around this path.
- Throw away any trimmed meat or meat that is bruised or contains hair, dirt, bone fragments or grass.
- Examine the deer carcass for previous wounds that may contain lead.
- Look for small pieces of lead when cutting and trimming meat.
- Frequently check the meat grinder for lead fragments, and clean appropriately.
- Process only one deer at a time to ensure lead from one deer is not processed along with the meat of another.

Can processed venison be donated to food pantries?

Although the Illinois Department of Public Health does not regulate donated meat, food pantries and charities should only accept venison from processors who are following the recommendations of this fact sheet.

Where can I get more information?

Illinois Department of Public Health

Division of Environmental Health

525 W. Jefferson St.

Springfield, IL 62761

217-782-5830

TTY (hearing impaired use only) 800-547-0466

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