



Safe venison handling helps to avoid spoiling your season

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MADISON – It looks like next week’s gun deer season will be a cold one, but food safety officials warn that venison handling can lead to foodborne illness if not done properly even if the weather isn’t warm.

“Harmful bacteria can grow quickly, so we want to make sure that hunters are clear about how to keep their harvest fresh and wholesome,” said Cindy Klug, manager of the Bureau of Meat Safety and Inspection for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP).

Klug offers the following important tips to ensure your venison doesn’t spoil before you have the chance to enjoy it.

In the field

- Field dress the carcass immediately after harvest.
- If processing deer from the CWD management zone, keep meat and trimmings from each deer separate. Minimize contact with the brain, spinal cord, spleen and lymph nodes (lumps of tissue next to organs or in fat and membranes) as you work.
- If removing antlers, use a saw designated for that purpose only, and dispose of the blade.
- Do not cut through the spinal column except to remove the head. Use a knife designated only for this purpose.
- Wash the body cavity with cold, clean water, if possible, and be sure to carry a clean towel for wiping your hands to prevent cross-contamination.
- Place the heart and liver in a food-grade plastic bag if you wish to keep them.
- Spread the rib cage to cool the carcass more quickly. Better yet, pack the carcass with clean ice.

Transporting it home

- Do not leave venison or other wild game in a car trunk where warmer temperatures promote bacterial growth.
- Register your deer by 5 pm the day after harvest and process it as soon as you possibly can.
- Call ahead to a licensed meat plant for processing.

Back home

- Refrigerate the carcass if possible. Avoid hanging it in your garage without refrigeration, especially in warm weather.
- Use food quality plastic bags or buckets to store cut meats. Do NOT use dark-colored garbage bags as they may contain toxic resins and are not intended for food use.

“The biggest mistake we see each year is that hunters hang their deer in the garage for too long thinking that the garage gets cold enough, but temperature fluctuations are not good for keeping meat safe to eat,” Klug said.

For more information about safe venison handling, visit datcp.wi.gov/food. You can also connect with us on Twitter at twitter.com/widatcp or Facebook at facebook.com/widatcp.