

Information about lead in venison

Minnesota Department of Health, October 2008

Lead in venison

- Lead is a toxic chemical, and the amount needed to cause health problems depends on a person's age and other lead exposures.
- In March 2008, lead fragments were found in some packages of venison donated to food shelves.
- Most of the lead fragments were found in ground venison.
- The Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources have made changes to the donation program to reduce the chances that lead fragments may end up in venison.
- The donation program changes include using only whole muscle meat rather than ground venison, educating meat processors about how to process the deer to reduce lead fragments, and testing samples of processed venison to make sure it does not contain lead fragments.
- Even though these changes have been made, there is a possibility that some venison obtained at food shelves may contain small lead fragments.
- Venison kept by hunters and their families may also contain lead fragments, especially if it was harvested using lead ammunition.

What are the health impacts from lead exposure?

- Lead in the blood can harm children and adults, but the exact level at which health effects occur depends on a number of factors, including other sources of lead, nutritional status, and age.
- Usually people who are lead poisoned do not seem to be sick, unless the amount of lead in their blood is very high. But even with no symptoms, lead may be causing damage.
- Children under the age of six are at greater risk for lead poisoning because their brains are still developing and they absorb lead much more easily than adults.
- Effects of lead in children may not be observed until several years after the lead exposure.
- Pregnant women should avoid lead exposure because lead can easily cross the placenta and transfer to the fetus.
- Although lead is also toxic for adults, they are less sensitive to the effects of lead and absorb less of the lead they take in.
- Frequent consumption of meat containing lead could lead to elevated blood lead levels. Less frequent consumption of lead-contaminated meat would cause much lower increases in long-term blood lead levels.

What can families do about lead in venison?

- The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) recommends that until further data are available about the presence of lead in venison, pregnant women and children less than six years old should not eat any venison from the food shelf or other venison harvested using ammunition that contains lead.
- If families are concerned about any lead exposure they may already have had, they should consult their physician, and consider getting a blood lead test.
- The Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) new bullet study provides additional information about how to reduce the risk of lead exposure for people who consume venison. Additional information about how to minimize lead exposure is available on the DNR website at: www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/lead/index.html .