

## Diseases

The city has identified three potential disease risks associated with deer:

### 1. Chronic wasting disease (CWD)

CWD is a serious issue — for people who eat deer meat, and in states where the disease has a strong presence. The Michigan DNR did not find any case of CWD in the state this year other than the private deer farm that prompted the ban on baiting for the 2008 hunting season. Hence, killing local deer out of a fear of CWD is simply irrational. However, for those who want to be extra safe, refraining from eating deer meat is surely the way to go. A little known fact regarding venison donated to food banks is that it does not have to be inspected for lead and other diseases.



### 2. Illness caused by contact with deer feces

When contacted about this issue, a staff member of the Ottawa County Health department did not know of any record of residents who have become ill through contact with deer feces, and had never heard of this being a public health issue in general. That said, most mothers generally teach their children not to play with feces, regardless of the source, and to wash their hands should they come in contact with feces. Following this time tested rule seems more sensible than trying to reduce the aggregate amount of deer feces in our community by killing a large number of deer every year. After all, shall we contemplate eradicating the squirrels, birds, cats, dogs and other animals in our community in order to create a feces-free environment?

### 3. Lyme Disease

Between 2002 and 2009 the Michigan Departments of Agriculture and Community Health found a Lyme Disease incidence rate of 1.32 to 2.77 case per 100,000 residents of Ottawa County. Regardless of the rate of infection, it's important to understand that people don't catch Lyme disease from deer. The tick is named after the White Footed Deer Mouse – not the deer. It is ticks that transmit the disease to humans. If a person is bitten by an infected tick, and does not remove the tick within 36 hours, they may contract Lyme disease. One study indicated that the risk of infection from a recognized tick bite was 1 to 2 percent.

If infection does occur, early and appropriate treatment almost always results in a prompt and uncomplicated cure. So, if our community is serious about lowering our already comparatively low rate of this disease, does it make sense to kill lots of deer? While it is true that deer and other large mammals play a part in the reproductive cycle of deer ticks, who feed on them before laying their eggs, most cases where killing deer has been shown to be effective in significantly reducing tick populations have been on islands and peninsulas where it was possible to carry the killing to the extent of near eradication. **The American Lyme Disease Foundation does not advocate for deer killing programs to**

**control the spread of Lyme disease.** Instead, they promote the use of a technology called the “4 Poster” that kills the mature ticks on deer. The 4 Poster method has been shown capable of reducing tick populations by 92-98% over three years.



Another effective method is to use simple cardboard tube and box applicators that apply an agent that kills the immature ticks called nymphs that are feeding on field mouse hosts. Ticks at the nymph stage are the most common transmitters of Lyme disease to humans. These sorts of devices have been shown to reduce tick populations by a high percentage as well. Probably the simplest, most cost-effective, and safest method of reducing our already low rate of Lyme disease is education. If people know to dress properly before venturing into areas where ticks are known to be found, if they bathe after time spent in nature and then check themselves and their children for ticks, and if they know how to recognize the symptoms of Lyme disease, the risks can be substantially reduced. This can be accomplished by supporting the efforts of the Ottawa County Health Department to educate the people of our county as well as to offer more advanced training for area health care professionals in the diagnosis of the disease. Some [scientists](#) have found that deer-free areas may actually be a haven for ticks and disease because the deer are referred to as dilution hosts or dead-end hosts. Dr. John Hadidian, a wildlife scientist, refutes the killing of deer as a Lyme disease deterrent in his article, “[Is killing deer really a necessity?](#)” published in the Gazette News.