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Hunters concerned as virus kills white-tailed deer population

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BALLARD COUNTY, Ky. — This year's deer season may be a little sparse. That's because the white-tailed deer population is quickly dying off after catching a deadly virus.

The warm weather and lack of rain have caused water sources to dry up, insects to multiply and disease to be plentiful, putting all wildlife in danger. This time, it's white-tailed deer at risk.

Across the country, hunters have found hundreds of white-tailed deer dead. The cause: Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease.

EHD is a naturally-occurring virus spread by a biting midge fly. It causes the deer to bleed internally, salivate uncontrollably and lose its appetite. The virus has virtually taken out Montana and North Dakota's white-tailed deer population.

"We haven't found any yet but we're expecting it here in Kentucky," said avid hunter and owner of Waldon Lodge, Ricky Waldon. "As dry as it is, let's hope we don't get it because that could be a very big impact on our big bucks and even our small deer."

Justin Mason is also an avid hunter. He works as a land specialist for Whitetail Properties. He manages deer year-round, looking for the perfect property for his clients.

"I walk property a lot," Mason said. "So, I'm constantly looking close to water sources. With the heat and drought the way it is, the disease causes them, basically their throat to swell up and tongue and dehydrates them so they're trying to get to water."

The Department of Fish and Wildlife said if you encounter an infected deer to call your local office and report the animal.

Good news here: humans cannot catch the disease, so handling infected animals or eating them is safe.