

Texas is a sportsman's paradise for hunting wild hogs. With an estimated population of more than three million of the prolific feral (wild) animals roaming across the state, many ranchers welcome hunters to help with population control.

"Today, almost all feral hogs are actually domestic hogs that have escaped or were released from pens. With each generation in the wild, the pigs refine the traits needed to survive," explained Dr. Bob Hillman, Texas' state veterinarian. "The animals are alternatively praised for hunting, and hated for damaging crops and fences, gouging holes in pastures, and killing young lambs, goats or ground-nesting birds."

"Like any wild animals, feral swine can carry parasites or diseases, some of which could be transmitted to humans. One is swine brucellosis, a bacterial disease that has been detected in about one percent of wild hogs tested. When handling carcasses, hunters should take basic precautions to protect against disease and pest exposure, and most importantly, prevent blood-to-blood contact with the animals," said Dr. Hillman, who also heads the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), the state's livestock and poultry health regulatory agency.

Dr. Hillman urged hunters to:

1. Avoid eating or drinking (or reaching for cigarettes or chewing tobacco) when field-dressing or handling carcasses. Don't risk putting "germs" directly in your mouth!
2. Put on latex or rubber gloves before making the first cut.
3. Wear long sleeves to avoid getting animal blood into scratches, open wounds or skin lesions.
4. Wear a dusk mask and glasses or safety goggles to prevent blood or bodily fluids from splashing into eyes, nose or mouth.
5. As much as possible, avoid contact with reproductive organs and fetuses.
6. Wash hands thoroughly and disinfect knives when finished.
7. Launder hunting clothes in hot water as soon as possible.
8. Follow safe-handling procedures with the meat and cook it to at least 160 degrees F.

Although rarely seen today, swine brucellosis can be contracted by humans, with symptoms that can include night sweats, swollen joints, back pain and general illness. If a hunter is cut while field-dressing a feral hog, exposed to the animal's blood or bodily fluids, or develops symptoms comparable to those listed, a physician should be consulted, so appropriate diagnostic tests can be run. Medical care and antibiotic treatment are essential for recovery, said Dr. Hillman.

"Hunters should not be overly concerned, but they should practice good hygiene when handling carcasses of any animals," said Dr. Hillman. "These basic biosecurity measures are a good habit to develop; one that can protect your health."

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