HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FISH DISEASE
Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS)

What is VHS?
• VHS is an infectious disease of fish.
• There are several strains of VHS that affect fresh and saltwater fish species.
• VHS disease outbreaks may happen at any time, but are most likely during the spring as temperatures fluctuate and fish are reproducing.
• The Great Lakes strain of the virus is new and appears to be affecting many species of fish including:
  - Walleye
  - Yellow perch
  - Muskellunge
  - Smallmouth bass
  - Rock bass
  - Chinook salmon
  - Black crappie
  - White bass
  - Emerald shiners
  - Bluntnose minnows
  - Spottail shiners
  - Freshwater drum
  - Round goby
  - Gizzard shad

Can VHS infect people?
• No, the virus does not affect humans.
• Fish carrying the VHS virus are safe to eat and to handle.

Where has VHS been found?
• Lake Huron
• Lake Erie
• Detroit River
• St. Lawrence River
• Lake St. Clair
• Lake Ontario
• Niagara River

What does a fish with VHS look like?

A fish can look healthy, showing no signs at all.

Or a fish can look sick, showing signs of disease.

Some fish show the following signs:
• Pale gills and organs
• Bloated abdomens
• Bulging eyes
• Hemorrhages (bleeding) on body and organs
• Darker body colour
Fish Farmers Can Help Prevent VHS From Spreading

How does VHS spread?

- VHS can spread through the water, on infected fish, or with their body fluids.
- VHS may be spread from one waterbody to the next by any method that involves the movement of fish, water, vessels or equipment that has had contact with the virus.
- It is illegal to stock fish infected with VHS virus and other disease organisms.
- Isolate any fish that appear to be sick to minimize the spread of disease.
- Develop and implement a biosecurity program including strict sanitary procedures for visitors, suppliers, staff, equipment and vehicles.
- Install disinfection stations at farm entry and exit locations.
- Ensure predators and scavengers cannot gain access to fish and fish feed.
- Collect fish mortalities in secure containers with tight-fitting lids. Dispose of mortalities in a landfill or compost facility.
- Optimize fish health with good nutrition, water quality, minimal handling, and optimal stocking densities.
- Control facility effluent to minimize impact on fish-bearing waters.
- Develop and implement a fish health management plan including routine screening.
- VHS in your facility may result in increases of disease outbreaks and/or mortalities.
- If you suspect VHS or any illness contact your veterinarian.

Slow the spread of VHS

- Eggs collected from wild stock should be disinfected during the water-hardening stage of fertilization with an iodine-based solution. Best Management Practices are available at MNR District offices or at ontario.ca/mnr.
- Import disease-free eggs and/or fish. Request a health certificate stating that fish have been tested and are free of VHS prior to movement.
- These actions will help slow the spread of fish diseases.

For general enquiries, call:
Ministry of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Information Centre
1-800-667-1940

For reporting fish die-offs, call:
Ministry of Natural Resources
1-877- TIPS-MNR (847-7667)

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