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Apart from a couple of brief cool downs, old man winter seems to have left us out thus far. As a result, water temperatures may not have very far to warm up before being in an optimal range for bacterial diseases in your fish pond. Many ponds will go the entire season without seeing any sign of a bacterial infection, others may not be so lucky. For example, columnaris infections are a common occurrence in the spring months and then again in the fall. With the mild winter thus far this year, pond owners may begin to see infections earlier than normal.

So, how do you know if your fish are sick? Generally speaking, you will see a change in their behavior. They may stop feeding as vigorously, or be at the surface or pond edge swimming lethargically. You may be able to see color changes or sores on them.

How do you keep your fish healthy? The most critical part of maintaining a healthy fish population is the water quality. Reduce oxygen stress by providing aeration, maintaining a healthy alga bloom, and feeding in the mornings after sunrise can help reduce stress on your fish. In most cases, the disease will run its course causing minimal loss when the water quality is maintained. If your fish are dying, remove the dead fish from the pond, and call your fisheries or aquaculture extension agent. Be prepared to give details including the overall condition of the fish, number that have died, and how they are eating.

Unfortunately, diseases are a part of pond management. Some ponds will have trouble every year while others may never experience an outbreak. Most of the time the damage is minimal, particularly where high water quality is maintained. Diseases are cyclical in ponds, appearing in late spring/early summer, and again in the fall when water temperatures are cooling off. Be aware of the potential for diseases, and pay attention to your fish and water quality, and you should be able to enjoy your fish all season long.

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