

May 2007

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:

Game fish

Walleye
Yellow perch
Muskellunge
Smallmouth bass
Rock bass
Chinook salmon
Black crappie
White bass

Bait fish

Emerald shiners
Bluntnose minnows
Spottail shiners

Other species

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?



Photo: John Lumsden

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



Photo: John Lumsden

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

Anglers 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 water body to the next by any method that involves the movement of fish, water, vessels or equipment that has had contact with the virus.



Photo: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources/Heather Bickle

Slow the spread of VHS

- Use bait fish that have been harvested locally.
- Use roe (fish eggs) as bait only when fishing in the same waterbody where roe was collected.
- Do not discard roe or bait fish in lakes or rivers. Place unused bait in the garbage.
- Do not move live fish from one location to another.
- Remove all mud, aquatic plants and animals from all gear, boat motors and trailers before leaving a body of water.
- When cleaning/gutting fish, ensure that the waste products do not contact waterways. Dispose of fish internal organs, skin, scales, heads and tails in the garbage.
- Equipment and clothing used during angling activities should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- After angling at a waterbody known to contain VHS, clean and disinfect live wells with a 10% household bleach/water solution (i.e., 100 ml of household bleach to 1 litre of water). Rinse well to remove residual chlorine and discard away from fish-bearing waters. Chlorine is toxic to fish.
- Empty bait fish containers, live wells and bilges away from water, in an area where the water will be absorbed into the ground.

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)