

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

Aquarists Can Help Prevent VHS From Spreading

How does VHS spread?

- To date, VHS has not been found in any aquarium fish.
- 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 may have had contact with the virus.



Photo: Heather Graham

Slow the spread of fish diseases

- It is illegal to release fish into natural waterways.
- It is illegal to collect wild fish from any natural waterway to stock an aquarium.
- Dispose of dead fish in a landfill or compost facility. Do not flush them down the toilet.
- Aquarium water and waste material can be disposed of in the municipal sewer system. Do not pour waste water in municipal sewer drains at the roadside or into fish-bearing waters.
- Optimize fish health with good nutrition and water quality.
- If you do not use municipally-treated water, disinfect the water and equipment with a 10% household bleach solution (i.e., 100 ml of household bleach per litre of water and let sit for 1 hour) prior to discharge on the ground. Rinse well to remove residual chlorine and discard away from fish-bearing waters. Chlorine is toxic to fish.

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
1-866-929-0994