

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

Property Owners 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.



Photo: Elizabeth Wright

Slow the spread of VHS

- The water is safe to swim in.
- It is recommended that you take care when handling dead or decomposing fish. Wear gloves or cover your hands with plastic bags and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards
- If you find dead fish along your shoreline, bury them if you wish or place them in the garbage. Wear gloves or cover your hands with plastic bags and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards.
- Although there are no human health concerns from VHS, if a fish is already dead or behaving abnormally when you find it, do not eat it.
- Protect your pet. Do not allow your pet to eat or pick up dead fish from the ground or water.
- The death of large numbers of fish in lakes is not uncommon at certain times of the year. Low oxygen levels, temperature fluctuations, and severe weather could cause die-offs.

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)