

February 2012

## ANGLERS CAN HELP SLOW THE SPREAD OF FISH DISEASE

### Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS)

#### What is VHS?

- VHS is an infectious disease of fish that was first detected in Lake Ontario in 2005.
- 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 affects or is carried by many species of fish including:

#### Game fish

Walleye  
Yellow Perch  
Muskellunge  
Smallmouth Bass  
Rock Bass  
Chinook Salmon  
Black Crappie  
White Bass

#### Baitfish

Emerald Shiners  
Bluntnose Minnows  
Spottail Shiners

#### Other species

Freshwater Drum  
Round Goby  
Gizzard Shad



#### What could a fish with VHS look like?

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



Photo: John Lumsden

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

#### Can VHS infect people?

- No, the virus does not affect humans.
- Fish carrying the VHS virus are safe to eat and to handle. As a precaution, do not harvest fish that appear sick, dying or dead.

#### Where has VHS been found?

- Until 2011, the waters of Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron and their connecting waterways and adjacent tributaries up to the first impassable barrier for all fish species were considered positive for VHS. In 2011, VHS was detected in Lake Simcoe.

#### What signs can a fish show?

- Pale gills and organs
- Bloated abdomen
- Bulging eyes
- Hemorrhages (bleeding) on body and organs
- Darker body colour

It is important to remember that some fish do not show any signs of infection. To help slow the spread of VHS, follow the actions in this fact sheet.

# Fact Sheet

## Feuille de renseignements



Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) Ministère des Richesses naturelles (MRN)

### 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.

### How can you help?

- **Don't dump your bait!**
  - It is illegal to dump the contents of any bait container into the water or within 30 m of any lake, pond, river or stream.
  - Always put unwanted roe or baitfish in the garbage and empty bait bucket water on dry land.
- **Use bait that has been harvested locally.**
  - Talk with local bait dealers about where they acquire their supply.
  - Buy your baitfish and roe from where you plan to fish.
- **Empty baitfish containers, livewells and bilges away from water**, in an area where the water will be absorbed into the ground.
- **Inspect and remove** mud, aquatic plants and animals from all gear, boat motors and trailers before leaving a waterbody.
- After fishing in a waterbody known to contain VHS:
  - **Clean and disinfect livewells** with a 10% household bleach/water solution (i.e., 100 ml of household bleach to 900 ml of water).
  - **Rinse livewell** to remove residual bleach and discard away from waterbody.
- **When cleaning fish, do not throw waste products into waterways.** Dispose of fish internal organs, skin, scales, heads and tails in the garbage.



### These actions will help slow the spread of fish diseases.

For general enquiries and to report fish die-offs, call:

Ministry of Natural Resources  
Natural Resources Information Centre  
1-800-667-1940

To view the rest of this VHS Fact Sheet series and for information about the Ministry of Natural Resources' VHS management actions, please visit:

<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/LetsFish/2ColumnSubPage/241211.html>

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