

February 2012

COMMERCIAL BAIT OPERATORS 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

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 could 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.

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. **...2**

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.



Photo: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources/ Brenda Koenig

How can you help?

- **Follow all Commercial Bait Licence conditions.** Call your local MNR office with questions.
- **Look for baitfish displaying any signs of VHS** when inspecting catch or bait received from other operators. Report any suspect findings to your local MNR office.
- **Separate new and old shipments/catches of fish and sterilize** holding tanks and equipment before delivering or accepting new shipments of baitfish.
- **Avoid storing live baitfish in holding facilities that are linked through an inflow or outflow to natural waters.**
- **Encourage anglers to use locally harvested bait**, and not to move bait out of the VHS Management Zone and Lake Simcoe Management Zone.
- **Thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and clothing** used during fish harvesting activities before moving to another waterbody.
 - Use a 10% household bleach/water solution (i.e., 100 ml of household bleach to 900 ml of water).
 - Rinse well to remove residual bleach, discard away from waterbodies and dry thoroughly.
 - Virkon® S is also a widely available disinfectant. Follow the instructions on the product label.
 - Keep gear and equipment used inside the Zones separate from that used outside the Zones.
- **Don't release live bait**, or empty the contents of a bait container into any waterbody or within 30 m of any waterbody. It's illegal! Also remind anglers of this.

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

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