

Help Prevent the Spread of Fish Disease **Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia**

What is VHS?

- VHS is an infectious disease of fish.
- There are several strains of VHS that affect fresh and saltwater fish species.
- The Great Lakes strain of the virus is new and appears to be affecting multiple species of fish, including:

Game Fish

Walleye
Yellow perch
Muskellunge
Smallmouth bass
Rock bass
Chinook salmon

Baitfish

Emerald shiners
Bluntnose minnows

Can VHS infect people?

- No, the virus does not affect humans.
- Fish carrying the VHS virus are safe to eat. VHS is destroyed at human body temperature.
- Fish carrying the VHS virus are safe to handle.

What does a fish with VHS look like?

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



Photo by John Lumsden

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



Photo by John Lumsden

- Corkscrew swimming behaviour
- Darkening of body colour
- Pale gills and organs
- Bleeding
- Bulging eyes
- Bloated abdomens
- Hemorrhaging on body and organs

Where has VHS been found?

- Lake Ontario
- Lake St. Clair
- St. Lawrence River
- Detroit River
- Lake Erie
- Lake Huron
- Niagara River
- Conesus Lake, NY

HELP PREVENT VIRAL HEMORRHAGIC SEPTICEMIA (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 via any method that involves the movement of fish, water, vessels or equipment that has had contact with the virus.



Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources/Heather Bickle

How can I help prevent VHS?

- Use baitfish that has been harvested locally.
- Remove all mud, aquatic plants and animals from all gear, boat motors and trailers before leaving a body of water.
- When cleaning/gutting caught fish, ensure that the waste products do not contact other 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. Drying or exposure to sunlight are acceptable methods of disinfection capable of killing the virus.
- After angling at a water body known to contain VHS, clean and disinfect live wells with a 10% household bleach/water solution. (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.
- Do not discard baitfish in a lake or river. Place them in the garbage.

**These actions will help stop the spread
VHS and other fish diseases.**

Contact Information:

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

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