



A BUCKET OF LIVE BAIT CAN CARRY DEADLY DISEASE

With the month of August edging up against September people who love to fish will be rushing off to their favorite lakes and streams to enjoy the last days of summer. Many will be bringing along their trusty fishing gear and a bucket of live baitfish that they have caught in a stream near their house.

Unknowingly, they may be carrying more than baitfish to that inland lake or river. They could be transporting an infectious disease into a pristine body of water. That healthy looking bait could be carrying or infected with an invasive organism or viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHS), an infectious disease that can rapidly kill fish, warns Dr. Kathleen Hartman, U.S. Department of Agriculture aquaculture epidemiologist.

“The movement and use of baitfish is one of the most significant ways to introduce and spread VHS,” says Hartman. “Because fish can be infected without showing outward signs of the disease, baitfish from a VHS contaminated body of water can be carried quite innocently to another which is VHS free.”

There is no cure or vaccination for VHS, she notes. “It thrives in colder waters and once it gets into those waters, it will stay. The best way to contain the virus is to take appropriate steps not to spread it.”

To that end, several states – and the province of Ontario in Canada have implemented regulations pertaining to baitfish movement. Fishing enthusiasts in the Great Lakes region should only buy baitfish from dealers that test for VHS if they plan to transport them, says Hartman. “If you catch your own baitfish, please use it only in the waters where it was caught. Discard unused bait in receptacles that are provided near boat launches or in a secure trash location.”

Dr. Hartman also points out the VHS can hide in dirt and mud on your boat and in bilge and ballast water. “Wash your boat down, preferably with hot water and bleach, after every time it has been in the water and be sure to empty any bilge water before trailering it to another water body,” she says.

For more information on VHS and the easy steps that can prevent its spread visit www.FocusOnFishHealth.org. While you’re there check out the photo contest!

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