



Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS)

Background

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) is a highly contagious disease affecting freshwater and marine fish. A number of recreational and sport fish species are susceptible to it, including muskellunge, small mouth bass, yellow perch, certain baitfish and commercial fish.

Primarily known to affect farmed fish in Europe, a new strain was first discovered in the Great Lakes in 2005. Since then, VHS has been reported in dead or diseased wild fish in all five Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River and a number of inland lakes in Michigan, New York, Ohio and Wisconsin.

The disease is not a threat to human health. However, it can impact the ecological balance of wild fish populations and negatively impact the enjoyment of recreational fishing and boating.

VHS can kill large numbers of fish in a short period of time. Signs of disease include internal and external hemorrhages (bleeding), bulging eyes, erratic swimming and fluid in the abdomen. Some fish species may be infected without showing signs of disease. These fish can spread the virus to other fish or locations and contaminate water sources or equipment.

The disease can be spread in a number of ways by people, animals and things. For example, people can transfer a fish to other waters without realizing it's infected, or move an invasive organism without knowing it. The tiny organisms can hide on equipment, clothing or in dirt and mud on your boat trailer. Boat bilge water, ballast water, floats, scuba tanks, and jet drives can also carry the obnoxious hitchhikers. Zebra mussels can attach to your boat hull and ride along with you to your next aquatic destination. Infected bait, moved from one lake to another, can spread disease.

Recreational fishermen and boaters can infect their favorite fishing areas unless they take simple steps to prevent contamination. Learn more at www.FocusOnFishHealth.org.

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Media representatives may contact Charlotte Roy, Public Relations Director at croy@diversitymc.com, 404-531-6777 or 404-313-2860