

The Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia Virus (VHSv) in Wisconsin

Test results returned in recent weeks show that a fish virus that has been detected in fish from the Lake Winnebago system, Lake Michigan and Green Bay hasn't spread more widely in Wisconsin, as originally feared. Those results suggest there's a very real hope that viral hemorrhagic septicemia can be kept out of most of Wisconsin lakes and rivers, where it could prove a serious threat to a broad range of native fish.

Everyone needs to take steps to avoid accidentally spreading VHS this summer. Fish immune systems are stronger with warmer water temperatures and better able to withstand the virus, but infected fish still carry the virus during this time. VHS outbreaks are expected as water temperatures cool in the fall to 60 degrees.

VHS was not thought to be a virus affecting coolwater species until 2005, when VHS-caused fish kills first were documented in the eastern Great Lakes fish including coolwater species. Concerned that the virus might show up in Wisconsin in the near future, DNR started testing the parent fish and coolwater fish it stocked from all waters in 2007 and is working with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to develop egg disinfection protocols for 2008 that would further reduce the risk of transmitting the disease.

“These changes are an important part of the overall effort to stop the spread of VHS to Wisconsin,” Staggs says. “With our recent emergency rules, we asked anglers and boaters to never move live fish around and to drain water from their boats and fishing gear before leaving VHS waters. They should know that DNR will be doing its part to make sure the virus isn’t spread.”

VHS is not a human health threat but can kill a broad range of native fish. It caused large fish kills in several eastern Great Lakes in 2005 and 2006. The fish virus is shed into the water by infected fish, where it can survive for 14 days and be absorbed by healthy fish. The virus can also be transmitted when fish eat infected fish.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Mike Staggs (608) 267-0796 or visit <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/vhs.html>

We want people to continue to enjoy Wisconsin's great fishing and boating, but want everyone to do their part:

- Drain all water from your boat and trailer, containers, and fishing equipment including bait buckets and coolers.
- Do not move live fish, including unused minnows, from these waters. All fish must be dead before leaving the landing or shoreline. Ice your catch and discard your minnows.
- Do not use minnows unless they were purchased from a licensed Wisconsin bait dealer or you caught them from the water you are fishing.
- Remove all visible plants, animals, and mud from your boat and trailer.