

for Immediate Release

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Illinois Announces Emergency Regulations to Stop Spread of Fish Virus

VHS detected in Illinois waters of Lake Michigan – No threat to human health

Regulations impact anglers, boaters, and aquaculture

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) today announced emergency regulations aimed at slowing the spread of fish-killing Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) in Illinois after sampling of fish in the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan detected the presence of VHS in two species of fish sampled.

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) is a disease of fish caused by an aquatic virus previously unidentified in the Midwest. While it does not affect humans, VHS can kill a substantial number of fish and has been spreading throughout the Great Lakes.

“The new regulations we are implementing are immediate and appropriate steps in trying to slow the spread of this dangerous aquatic virus in Illinois,” said IDNR Acting Director Sam Flood. “Sport fishing and boating are both very popular and important to the Illinois economy. The cooperation of anglers and boaters is essential in combating VHS.”

The new emergency regulations being implemented by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) regarding VHS that affect recreational anglers and boaters include:

- Eliminating natural water from all equipment when leaving a body of water.
- Emptying and draining all bait buckets, livewells, baitwells, bilges, etc. or any other compartment capable of holding natural waters when leaving a body of water.
- Do not remove live VHS-susceptible species (see below) from any waters. Anglers may catch and keep VHS-susceptible species, but may not transport those fish live from the waters where caught.
- Use of wild-trapped fishes from within the state as bait will be restricted to the waters where legally captured.

Black crappie

Bluegill

Bluntnose minnow

Brown bullhead

Brown trout

Burbot

Channel catfish

Chinook salmon

Emerald shiner

Freshwater drum

Gizzard shad

Hybrid (Tiger) muskie

Lake whitefish

Largemouth bass

Muskellunge

Shorthead redhorse

Northern Pike
Pumpkinseed
Rainbow trout
Rock bass
Round goby
Silver redhorse
Smallmouth bass
Spottail shiner
Trout-Perch
Walleye
White bass
White perch
Yellow perch

New emergency regulations are also being implemented immediately regarding fish stocking and the transport of fish in Illinois:

- All fish imported from affected areas (currently the eight Great Lakes states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.) must be certified as free of VHS.
- All susceptible species for stocking public waters must be certified VHS free regardless of their point of origin (including both intra- and inter-state shipments). Wild-trapped minnows and other wild-trapped species must be certified VHS-free, or originate from west of the Mississippi River.

On June 5, the IDNR was notified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources of positive VHS samples from a fish kill involving round gobies in the Milwaukee area – and on June 13 positive samples were discovered from yellow perch in the same location. As a result, IDNR fisheries biologists submitted samples of bluegill, rock bass, round gobies, and pumpkinseed from Winthrop Harbor (Lake Michigan) on June 10-11. Although the fishes sampled showed no clinical signs of disease and were not part of a fish kill, tests confirmed the presence of VHS in the round goby and rock bass samples on June 25.

Fish can be infected with VHS by direct contact with other infected fish, by a fish consuming its infected prey, or from contact with water which contains the virus. The highly contagious virus causes fish to bleed to death, and advanced symptoms include hemorrhages in the eyes, skin and gills. There is no vaccine for the virus and control methods rely entirely on surveillance and eradication efforts.

“With the discovery of VHS in the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan, we need to act immediately to try to protect our inland waters from VHS,” said IDNR Chief of Fisheries Steve Pallo. “The urgency is amplified by the fact that a significant amount of Lake Michigan water enters the Illinois River system through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. These emergency regulations and the cooperation of anglers, boaters, and the aquaculture industry are keys to slowing the spread of VHS into other waters in Illinois.”

In recent years, surveillance for aquatic diseases affecting fish has been increased throughout the state. The IDNR will continue its surveillance program, and fish produced at state hatcheries will be tested before they are stocked into Illinois waters. All fish eggs and imports

of fish to state facilities will be disinfected and tested prior to import to ensure that VHS does not jeopardize operation of the state fish hatchery system.

While VHS is not known to be a threat to human health, anglers are still advised to wash their hands after handling fish and to cook thoroughly any fish they plan to eat. If handling dead fish or fish that appear to be diseased, protective gloves should be worn. For more information on VHS and the new Illinois regulations aimed at slowing the spread of the virus in Illinois, check the IDNR web site at <http://dnr.state.il.us>