

pletely drying your boat and trailer will also reduce the risk of infecting other waters.

What should I do if I see a fish kill or diseased fish? It is not uncommon to see a few dead fish from time to time that die from natural causes. However, if you see large numbers of dead or dying fish or see fish covered with red spots, you may report the sighting to the DNR by calling the local DNR service center, fish biologist, warden or by calling the toll free Hotline number at 1-800-TIPWDNR. Make note of the waterbody, date, fish species, and approximate number of dead/dying fish. If you caught a suspicious looking fish, place the fish in a plastic bag and then in a cooler on ice.



For specific regulations and additional information on the VHS virus visit:

dnr.wi.gov/fish/vhs/

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FISHING WITH BAIT



What Wisconsin anglers need to know to prevent spreading the VHS fish virus

Bureau of Fisheries Management
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VIRAL HEMORRHAGIC SEPTICEMIA

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia, or VHS, is a fish disease that was found in Lake Michigan and the Winnebago system in May 2007, and Lake Superior in January 2010. The virus may also be present in the Wisconsin River, the Mississippi River and connected waters.



Signs of the VHS virus in fish include bloody spots on the skin and in the muscle and tissues, pale or swollen internal organs, and swollen eyes.

VHS is not a threat to people who handle fish or eat their catch. However, this disease can spread easily to healthy fish that eat infected fish or absorb water carrying the virus. This virus can affect a variety of Wisconsin fish and has caused large fish kills in several eastern Great Lakes states. Symptoms of VHS may include hemorrhaging (bleeding), bulging eyes, unusual behavior, anemia, bloated abdomens, and rapid onset of death. Further information can be found at dnr.wi.gov/fish/vhs/.

To keep fish healthy and prevent this deadly fish disease from spreading, Wisconsin laws prohibit boaters and anglers from moving water and live fish away from a waterbody. These laws seek to reduce the risk that water carrying VHS, other diseased organisms or an infected fish, is accidentally released into a new lake or river.



WISCONSIN LAW REQUIRES THAT YOU:

- Drain all water from vehicles, trailers, watercraft, containers, fishing equipment or gear of any type when leaving any state waters or their banks or shores, and before entering Wisconsin over land from another state. Exceptions: drinking water or up to 2 gallons of water being used to hold minnows that can be legally transported.
 - Do not transport any aquatic plants, live fish or live fish eggs away from any state waters. There are some exceptions for minnows obtained from a Wisconsin bait dealer or registered fish farm. These minnows may be transported away live and used again:
 - On the same water, or
 - On any other waters if no lake or river water, or other fish was added to their container.
 - Do not use dead fish, fish eggs, or fish parts as bait. There are three exceptions:
 - You may use any of these on any water body if they were preserved by a method that does not require freezing or refrigerating (example preservation methods can be found at dnr.wi.gov/fish/vhs/vhs_preservation.html), or
 - You may use unpreserved or just frozen dead fish, fish eggs or fish parts as bait on the same water from which they were collected or on Lake Michigan or Green Bay (and connecting waters upstream to the first barrier impassible to fish), or
- Live minnows that die during a fishing trip may be used during that fishing trip (they may not be used on later trips unless you meet the two conditions above).
- You may not possess or use bait minnows obtained outside of Wisconsin. This does not apply if the bait minnows were imported under a Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade

and Consumer Protection (DATCP) import permit, or obtained from Iowa or Minnesota and are being used only “between the tracks” on the Mississippi River.

■ Live crayfish may not be used as bait in Wisconsin, nor can you possess live crayfish and fishing equipment at the same time. However, you may use dead or parts of crayfish for bait on any waters or live crayfish “between the tracks” on the Mississippi River.

■ Minnow harvesting is closed on VHS affected waters including Lake Michigan (including Green Bay), Lake Superior, the Mississippi River, Lake Winnebago, Fox River from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay, and all connecting waters upstream to the first barrier impassible to fish. The only exception is that suckers (which are legally considered to be minnows) can be harvested and used as bait on the same body of water, but may not be transported away alive.

On other waters, minnows may be harvested: 1) for personal use but may not be transported alive away from the water, or 2) by Wisconsin bait dealers under a DNR wild bait harvest permit. (A listing of closed waters and permit information can be found at dnr.wi.gov/fish/vhs/vhs_widistribution.html).

WISCONSIN ANGLERS

How do these laws affect your fishing? Some of the most common questions about the VHS laws, boating laws, and using bait are answered below:

For these laws, what is considered a minnow? Minnows include: suckers, mudminnows, tadpole madtoms, stonecats, banded killifish, blackstripe topminnows, brook silversides, brook sticklebacks, ninespine sticklebacks, trout perch, darters, log perch sculpins, and all species in the minnow family cyprinid except goldfish and carp. Any species that is threatened or endangered or non-native to Wisconsin is not considered a minnow for purposes of these rules.

When is it legal to reuse bait minnows? Minnows may be used again: 1. on the same waterbody, or 2. on a different waterbody if no lake or river water or other fish or aquatic organism were added to the minnow container.

What constitutes the “same waterbody”?

Use the rule of “wet feet”. If you can wade or boat to a spot without leaving the water once you are on the water with the bait, it would be considered the same or connected waterbody.

Can I transport water away from a waterbody?

You may transport: 1. All drinking water, and 2. Up to 2 gallons of water to keep live, left-over minnows. All other water MUST be drained. This includes water from vehicles, equipment, gear, boats, trailers, motors, bilges, live wells, bait or other containers, etc. This also includes melted ice in coolers used to keep dead fish fresh. Ice not melted may be kept to keep your fish, food, or beverages cool.

Besides draining water from my vehicle, boat, gear and equipment, what else do I need to do when leaving a boat landing?

Wisconsin law also requires you to remove all aquatic plants and animals attached to any vehicle, watercraft, or object of any kind before launching or leaving the landing. To keep the access to the lake open, you may pull to a different part of the access, such as the parking lot, to drain your boat and remove any aquatic hitchhikers.

How do I properly dispose of my bait if I do not plan to use it later?

It is illegal to dump minnows, leeches or other bait into a waterbody from which they were not harvested. If possible, dispose of your unwanted bait in a trashcan at the boat landing or access point. Otherwise, you should take them home and properly dispose of them. Dispose of unwanted bait by: 1) placing them in the trash, 2) preserving them with one of the suggested preservation methods, or 3) use dead bait in composts or in gardens for fertilizer.

Where can I collect my own bait without a permit?

Worms and leeches can be collected without a permit or license. Minnows may be collected on non-VHS affected waters for personal use as long

as they are only used on the same waterbody they were collected from AND never transported away from that waterbody (not even if you only plan to use them later on that same waterbody). You do not need a bait dealer license or harvest permit if you do not possess more than 600 minnows.

Remember, **IT IS ILLEGAL** to:

1. Collect minnows on VHS positive or suspected waters, or 2. Possess minnow nets or traps on waters closed to minnow harvest (see dnr.wi.gov/fish/VHS/ for details). Exception: suckers may be harvested but may not be transported away live.

Can I transport minnows I have collected?

You may take DEAD minnows and preserve them with one of the suggested preservation methods. However, it is illegal to transport any harvested live minnows away from the waterbody where you caught them without a Wisconsin Wild Bait Harvester Permit and a Wisconsin Bait Dealer’s license.

Can I transport live gamefish or roughfish, like gizzard shad, away from the water?

No. However, the fish are considered dead if you remove the water from the container the fish are in (livewell, cooler or bucket) before you leave the shore and you do not try to revive them later.

Can I transport other bait like leeches, insects and worms?

These forms of bait may be transported away from any water live and used on any other waterbody. However, if they are kept in water, the water must be drained from their container before leaving that water, bank or shore. You may place leeches or insects back into drinking water after you have left the waterbody, bank and shore area. Note: This does not apply to fish or minnows.

If I don’t plan to harvest my own bait, where can I obtain bait?

Minnows must be purchased at a Wisconsin bait dealer or registered fish farm. However, minnows and other bait can also be obtained from Iowa or Minnesota if they are only possessed and used “between the tracks” of the Mississippi River.

Can I leave bait in a bait bucket or live box in the lake for use at a later date?

Yes, as long as the bait is only used on that same waterbody, and the container is clearly and legibly marked with your name and address. Containers may not be left on or attached to public property and you must have permission before attaching to any private property.

Can I use dead fish for bait?

The VHS virus is not killed by refrigeration or freezing. Therefore, dead fish can only be used:

- If you caught them on the same water you are fishing
- If they died in the bait bucket or on the hook while fishing that day
- They have been preserved in a manner that does not require refrigeration or freezing
- They were commercially produced and do not require refrigeration or freezing

Dead bait of any type can be used on Lake Michigan and waters of Green Bay or on the same water where the bait was harvested without having to first be preserved.

What are the rules about frozen bait (smelt, for example)?

Frozen fish CANNOT be used on any water other than where they were caught, unless they are first thawed and then preserved in a method that does not require refrigeration or freezing for long term storage. This does not apply to Lake Michigan or Green Bay, visit dnr.wi.gov/fish/documents/vhs_usingdeadfishasbait.pdf for details. Other preservation methods include, pickling in alcohol or mineral oil or drying in a salt/borax mixture.

Is it OK to transport dead fish that have eggs inside of them?

Yes, as long as the eggs are not removed later and fertilized for the purpose of producing fish.

What else can I do to make sure I do not transport this disease to other waters?

The VHS virus can survive in water for up to 2 weeks. You can sanitize your boat, trailer or equipment by washing it with a mixture of 2 tablespoons of household bleach per 1 gallon of water. Com-