

Do I have to drain the water from my drinking water containers and coolers, including melted ice in coolers used to keep fish or food and beverages cold? This rule does not apply to beverage containers, including bottled drinking water. Melted ice in coolers used to keep dead fish fresh also needs to be drained, but ice that has not yet melted may be kept to keep your fish, food, or beverages cool.

Besides draining the water from my boat, trailer, motor, bilge, live wells, bait containers, etc., 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 1/2 cup of household bleach per 5 gallons of water. Completely 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 calling the toll free Hotline number at 1-800-TIP-WDNR. 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:

fishingwisconsin.org

MINNOWS AS BAIT



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



Bureau of Fisheries Management
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Help Keep Wisconsin Fish Healthy

A new fish virus that caused large fish kills in several eastern Great Lakes states in 2005 and 2006 was discovered in Lake Michigan and Lake Winnebago in May 2007. The virus may also be present in Lake Superior and the Mississippi River.



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.

The viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus, or VHS is not a threat to people who handle fish or want to eat their catch. However, it can spread easily to healthy fish that eat infected fish or absorb water carrying the virus.

To keep fish healthy and prevent this deadly fish disease from spreading, rules prohibit boaters and anglers from moving water and live fish from a waterbody, with some exceptions (see below). The rules seek to reduce the risk that water carrying VHS, or an infected fish, is accidentally released into a new lake or river.

Anglers and boaters, please do your part to protect Wisconsin's great fishing by following these new rules:

■ You must drain all water from boats, containers and fishing equipment when leaving any state waters, banks or shores, or entering Wisconsin over land. This does not apply to any drinking water or up to 2 gallons of water being used to hold minnows that can be legally transported.

■ You may not transport any live fish or live fish eggs away from any state waters. There is an exception 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 were added to their container.

■ You may not use dead fish, fish eggs, or fish parts as bait. There are three exceptions:

- You may use dead fish, fish eggs, or fish parts as bait on any waters if they were preserved by a method that does not require freezing or refrigeration (example preservation methods can be found at fishingwisconsin.org), or

- You may use unpreserved or just frozen dead fish, fish eggs or fish parts as bait on the 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 minnows for bait that are obtained outside of Wisconsin. This does not apply if the minnows were imported under a Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) permit, or if they were obtained from Iowa or Minnesota and are being used only "between the tracks" on the Mississippi River.

■ VHS affected waters are closed to all minnow harvesting (currently these include Lake Michigan, 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 taken but may not be transported away alive. On other waters, minnows may be taken 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 fishingwisconsin.org).

WISCONSIN ANGLERS

How will the new rules affect your fishing? Some of the most common questions about the new VHS rules and using minnows as bait are answered below:

For these rules, what is considered a minnow?

Minnows include: suckers, mudminnows, madtoms, stonecats, killifish, sticklebacks, trout perch, darters, sculpins, and all species in the minnow family (except listed and nonnative species, and goldfish and carp).

Can I transport live gamefish or roughfish 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.

What impact do the new rules have on what I can do with my minnows?

If you meet one of the conditions below you do not have to dispose of your minnows.

- Anglers can take live minnows obtained from a Wisconsin bait dealer (which includes Wisconsin registered fish farms) away from a lake or river and use them again on that same waterbody.
- Anglers can also take live minnows obtained from a Wisconsin bait dealer (which includes Wisconsin registered fish farms) away from a waterbody and use them elsewhere if no lake or river water, or other fish were added to the bait container.

In both of these instances, you can move the amount of water needed to keep the minnows alive, up to 2 gallons. No other fish may be held in the minnow container.

Can I leave bait fish in a bait bucket or live box in the lake for use at a later date? Yes, as long as 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 collect my own minnows without a permit? It depends. To prevent the movement of likely infected fish, the DNR has prohibited minnow harvesting on the VHS known and suspect waters, including the Winnebago system, the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River and Wisconsin River upstream to the Prairie du Sac dam and all waters connected to these up to the first barrier impassable to fish. No person may harvest minnows from these waters, except that suckers may be harvested but may not be transported away live. It is illegal to use or possess minnow nets or traps on waters closed to minnow harvest. Additional waters may be included if found or suspected to be infected by the VHS virus. For the most updated VHS waters list, go to fishingwisconsin.org.

On non-VHS waters, however, you can collect minnows for personal use as long as you only use them for bait on the water you collected them from. It is illegal to transport any harvested live minnows away from the waterbody where you caught them. You do not need a bait dealer license or harvest permit if you do not possess more than 600 minnows.

The new rules say that I can trap minnows for bait, but I may only use them in the same waterbody where they were trapped. 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 water from an enforcement standpoint.

Those minnows cannot leave the water alive. Once the water has been drained from them, you can preserve them for use as dead bait.

Can I use dead fish for bait? Only if you caught them on the water you are fishing or they have been preserved in a manner that does not require refrigeration or freezing. If they were alive when you started fishing, you can use those unpreserved dead fish (fish that died in the bait bucket or on the hook)



Chemically preserved minnows are an option for anglers who fish dead bait.

while fishing that day. After you leave the lake they must be treated the same as all other dead bait and preserved before they can be used again.

You can also use commercially produced dead baits as long as they 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 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. (EXCEPTION: unpreserved frozen bait can be used on Lake Michigan and Green Bay and their tributaries upstream to the first barrier impassable to fish) Other preservation methods include, pickling in alcohol or mineral oil or drying in a salt/borax mixture.

For detailed preservation methods, see the VHS information at fishingwisconsin.org.

How do I properly dispose of my minnows if I do not plan to use them later? You may dispose of your minnows in a trash can at the boat landing or access point if one is available. Otherwise, you should take them home and dispose of them in the trash, compost them, or use them in a garden for fertilizer. You may also take minnows home and preserve them with one of the suggested preservation methods and then use them at a later date.

When I take my boat out of the water, what do I need to do?

The new VHS rules require that you drain all water from your boat and equipment, with the exception of up to 2 gallons of water allowed for your unused minnows that you obtained from a Wisconsin bait dealer. You should always remove all aquatic plants and animals from your boat and trailer before 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.

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.

Are there any additional restrictions on the use of other types of live bait, such as worms, leeches, insects or their larva?

No, other types of live baits such as worms, leeches, insects, larvae, are generally still legal to use. However, under the rules, all water is required to be drained from all equipment and containers used for fishing when you leave the water (except for up to 2 gallons holding the minnows). This includes water in containers that may contain leeches or aquatic insects. If you plan to add water later to keep this type of bait alive, you should add water from a safe source like a well or tap.