



NEWS RELEASE

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SUBJECT: **Virus that attacks northerns and musky found in Little Sturgeon Bay**
Slower spreading, more specific disease not as serious as VHS, but still a concern

STURGEON BAY – Bloody sores covering a northern pike caught near here were not caused by viral hemorrhagic septicemia, a deadly fish disease first detected in Wisconsin in May 2007. The sores were caused by a different fish virus that has been found periodically in Wisconsin over the past 25 years and was reported more frequently by anglers in 2007.

This virus causes a disease called Lymphosarcoma, which causes cancerous sores on the skin and in the muscle of northern pike and musky. It does not affect humans and is not a threat to people who handle the fish, according to Sue Marcquenski, Department of Natural Resources fish health specialist.

Lymphosarcoma is regarded as a less serious threat to fisheries than VHS because it affects far fewer species and spreads much more slowly. It is still a concern, however, because it can be deadly for northern pike and musky. “While northern pike can recover from the disease, it is more often fatal for muskies,” Marcquenski says.

The Little Sturgeon Bay northern pike represents the first reported case of Lymphosarcoma in the area, but the DNR in 2007 received reports of the disease in four different parts of the state. “I am not sure if that means Lymphosarcoma is spreading to new locations or if anglers are just noticing the lesions due to heightened awareness about VHS,” Marcquenski says.

Lymphosarcoma was reported in 2007 in northern pike in Eagle Lake in Racine County, King Lake in Polk County, the Petenwell Flowage in Juneau and Adams counties, and Nelson Lake in Sawyer County.

Initial infection with Lymphosarcoma may appear as purple and pink blisters on the skin and then develop into a bulging tumor up to four inches in diameter. The sores or tumors are found most frequently on the sides of fish but also on their head and fins, and may not develop for six to 18 months

after infection occurs. In favorable water temperatures less than 68 degrees, the disease progresses from skin to muscle tissue to the kidney, spleen and liver.

Lymphosarcoma spreads when healthy fish rub against the sores of infected fish during spawning, or come into contact with a landing net or other fishing equipment that's been in contact with infected fish, Marcquenski says.

In contrast, VHS spreads when healthy fish eat infected fish or come in contact with virus particles shed into the water by infected fish. The VHS virus can survive in water for 14 days. These transmissions mechanisms mean VHS can potentially spread very rapidly through fish populations.

VHS has not been detected in musky or northern pike any where in the state, although the disease was diagnosed in spring 2007 in drum from the Lake Winnebago system, brown trout from Lake Michigan, smallmouth bass from Sturgeon Bay, and lake whitefish from northern Green Bay. Paul Peeters, longtime fisheries biologist based out of Sturgeon Bay, says that publicity about VHS and the symptoms it causes in fish may lead to more reports of lymphosarcoma in the future.

“Anglers in the Sturgeon Bay and lakeshore areas are highly sensitized to fish with reddened areas and bleeding because of all of the VHS publicity of the past year,” he says. “To the untrained eye, it’s a bloody oozing mass, which is what we’ve been talking about with VHS.”

Anglers play a very important role in helping to prevent the spread of Lymphosarcoma, including taking the following steps:

- Never move any northern pike or musky from one waterbody to another, a practice already prohibited by rules to prevent the spread of VHS.
- If an angler has used a landing net or cradle on a fish that displays Lymphosarcoma sores, the angler should not use that gear for the rest of the trip and disinfect the gear once they get home.
- Clean all landing nets and live wells in contact with the disease as well as other gear that may transmit virus with high pressure hot water, or disinfect them with a solution of 1/3 cup of household bleach mixed in 5 gallons of tap water and left to soak for five minutes. Rinse well with tap water before using the equipment again.
- Anglers catching a fish that displays Lymphosarcoma symptoms should take a picture of the fish if it's under the legal size limit and note the time, date and location it was caught before releasing the fish and then contacting the local DNR fish biologist with that information. If the fish meets the minimum size limit, anglers should harvest the fish, place it in a plastic bag and take it to the local DNR office and arrangements will be made to test the fish.