

Revised VHS rules effective April 4, 2008

Revised rules to prevent the spread of VHS fish disease are effective April 4, 2008. The revised rules, like earlier versions, seek to limit the movement of live fish and water. Anglers moving infected bait minnows is the main way VHS is spread to new waters, followed at a distant second by people moving large quantities of contaminated water. A summary of those rules follows.

Anglers and Boaters

- May not leave lake or river banks or shores with any live fish or live fish eggs except for minnows purchased from a Wisconsin bait dealer, including fish farms, and transported under certain conditions, explained below.

Anglers may keep purchased minnows leftover after a fishing trip and use them on the same water; or they may take these leftover purchase minnows home and use them on another lake or river if the fish minnows were not exposed to any other fish or water from previously fished lakes or rivers.

- Must drain all water from boats and equipment when leaving any state waters or before entering the state over land. Anglers allowed to take live purchased minnows home under other provisions of the rule may transport the minnows in up to 2 gallons of water. No other fish may be kept in the same container with the minnows. Containers of drinking water do not need to be drained.

- May use dead fish, fish eggs, or fish parts for bait in certain instances, explained below.
Fresh or frozen fish are okay to use as bait on Lake Michigan or Green Bay and their tributaries upstream to the first barrier impassable to fish or for use on the water from which it was harvested.

Fish preserved by a method that does not require refrigeration or freezing is okay to use as bait on any water.

- May not use or possess live fish or live fish eggs for use as bait if obtained outside Wisconsin. Exceptions: bait from Iowa or Minnesota may be used on the Mississippi River "between the tracks" and imported bait may be used if it was imported in compliance with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection rules.
- May not use fish as bait for trapping crayfish or turtles unless the fish was harvested from the same water on which the trapping occurs or was purchased from a Wisconsin bait dealer.

Anglers who harvest wild bait for personal use

- May not harvest minnows or fish for minnows for any purpose or use or operate any minnow harvesting gear in Lake Michigan, Green Bay, Lake Superior, the Mississippi River, Lake Winnebago, the Fox River from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay, or any bay, slough or backwater of these waters, and all connecting waters upstream or the first barrier impassable to fish, or in any other water where the department has determined that the Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia virus is present. However, suckers from these waters may be harvested but may not be transported away live. A list of VHS waters can be found on the DNR's web site at dnr.wi.gov/fish/vhs

More on the back side...

Anglers who harvest wild bait for personal use

- On waters where minnow harvesting is not prohibited, anglers can harvest minnows for bait for their personal use only if they harvest the minnows from the water they will be fishing in. Live minnows harvested cannot be transported away from the water, bank or shore where harvested. Anglers can drain the water from their container carrying wild minnows and take them home for later use as dead bait in compliance with the dead fish as bait rules. Harvesting minnows for personal use does not require a bait dealer license or wild bait harvest permit as long as the total is less than 600 minnows.
- People who live on a lake or are vacationing at a resort may keep live bait in floating or submerged containers tethered to a dock or boat. Any unattended containers holding minnows or fish must be labeled with the owner's name and address.

People who harvest wild bait harvest for commercial use

- No one may harvest minnows for commercial sale from VHS-affected waters.
 - Harvesters must be a bait dealer and apply for a wild bait harvest permit and specify which lake or stream segment they will collect from and keep records of their harvest and what they did with the minnows.
 - May not possess farm-raised fish while engaged in harvesting operations or while transporting wild harvested minnows to the bait dealer's business location or from the water where harvested to the point of sale.
 - Must have all minnows harvested from the wild inspected by a qualified fish health expert and receive a Fish Health Certification before they can be distributed. Further, all species identified by the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS, as susceptible to VHS must have a negative VHS test before they can be distributed. Currently minnows on this list include, but is not limited to, emerald shiners, bluntnose minnows, and spottail shiners.
 - Harvesters are required to disinfect all of their gear before harvesting in another waterbody.
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