

QUICK FACTS ABOUT WHIRLING DISEASE FOR RECREATIONAL WATER USERS

Brought to you by the Ontario Animal Health Network

What is whirling disease?

Whirling disease is an infectious disease caused by the parasite *Myxobolus cerebralis*. Whirling disease is a cause of death in early life stages of susceptible freshwater finfish. Overall deaths of infected fry and fingerlings can reach 90%. Susceptible species include salmonids (salmon, trout and charr) commonly found in Ontario. Whirling disease is not a risk to human health.

If you are an angler

Be aware of the clinical signs of whirling disease. Diagnosis requires laboratory testing as not all infected finfish show signs of disease. There are no treatment options currently available for whirling disease. Finfish affected by whirling disease may exhibit any of the following signs:

- Swimming in a circular, whirling pattern
- Skeletal deformities including shortening of the mandible and/or operculum, indented skull, and crooked spine
- Discoloration of the tail and caudal fin, appearing dark or black in color



How is whirling disease spread?

Whirling disease is not spread directly between finfish. The parasite has a complex two-stage life cycle and produces two distinct infective spores. One kind of spore infects a freshwater oligochaete worm (*Tubifex tubifex*) found in aquatic sediment. A second kind of spore produced in the worm spreads to finfish through contact.

When enjoying recreational water activities, people can spread whirling disease by moving infected live or dead finfish, infected worms, contaminated equipment, or contaminated water.



Strategies to avoid spreading whirling disease

Anglers, boaters and recreational water users can help reduce the risk of spreading whirling disease in the wild.

1. Do not introduce live finfish from another country, move live fish from one body of water to another or dump unused bait
2. Do not use finfish purchased from a grocery store as bait for catching finfish or other aquatic animals
3. When cleaning and gutting finfish, dispose of all waste in municipal garbage
4. Before leaving the shoreline, drain equipment and dump any bilge water from watercraft
5. Thoroughly clean watercraft, trailers and equipment that has been in contact with water
6. Wash and disinfect the footwear and clothing worn when in contact with wild finfish
7. Allow for a minimum of 24 hours of drying time before entering new waters

What should you do if you suspect whirling disease?

If you suspect a case of whirling disease, call the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's TIPS line at 1-877-847-7667. Please include the date and time of suspected sighting, the river, stream, or lake name, and a description of observation.

