

QUICK FACTS ABOUT WHIRLING DISEASE FOR FISH FARMERS

— 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 frequently handle or work with finfish

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.

On a fish farm, whirling disease can be spread by moving infected live or dead finfish, infected worms, contaminated equipment, or contaminated water.

Strategies to avoid spreading whirling disease

1. Do not import live infected finfish into Canada
2. When cleaning and gutting finfish, dispose of all waste in municipal garbage
3. Thoroughly clean equipment that has been in contact with surface waters
4. Wash and disinfect the footwear and clothing worn when in contact with wild finfish
5. Allow for a minimum of 24 hours of drying time before using equipment in a new location

What should you do if you suspect whirling disease?

If you suspect a finfish that you are raising or keeping may have whirling disease, you are required under the federal Health of Animals Act to immediately notify the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) by calling the Ontario area office at 226-217-8555.

Also, please notify your veterinarian and the Ontario Animal Health Network at oahn.fish@uoguelph.ca

