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Frequently Asked Questions: Largemouth Bass Virus

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has documented the first case of Largemouth Bass Virus (LMBV) in California.

What is LMBV?

LMBV is a highly pathogenic double stranded DNA virus classified in the Iridoviridae family and Ranavirus genus. This virus is specific to largemouth bass but can cause disease signs in other fish species like smallmouth bass. Some species including spotted bass, bluegill and crappie are infected but rarely develop disease signs. Outbreaks tend to involve adult largemouth bass and can result in high mortality rates. Fish infected with LMBV can exhibit a wide range of disease signs such as skin sores or ulcers, darkened skin, distended body cavity, bulging eyes, redness, lethargy, erratic swimming behavior, surface swimming and difficulty submerging, and localized areas of necrotic tissue. Internally fish can have an over inflated air bladder, pale organs, and localized areas of necrosis of the organs.

Are humans or other animals besides largemouth bass at risk from LMBV?

LMBV targets largemouth bass and does not pose a risk to humans or other warm-blooded animals. There are no health concerns to anglers who consume largemouth bass or recreational users who swim or recreate in LMBV infected water. It is still recommended that fish are properly prepared to USDA guidelines to at least 145 degrees F to prevent other food borne illnesses.

How did LMBV arrive in California?

It is unknown how LMBV entered California. The lake where LBMV was identified has not stocked LMB in decades. Other ways LMBV can be introduced are from contaminated equipment, infected baitfish, stocking infected LMB, and introducing other carrier fish species that are infected.

How is it spread?

Largemouth bass can live with LMBV without becoming sick. The virus can be activated by a stressful event such as elevated water temperature like summer conditions, poor water quality, increased angling pressure, or being added to a new environment. Once LMBV is activated it spreads from fish to fish, by largemouth bass ingesting an infected fish, or through exposure to LMBV contaminated water. The first case of LMBV was documented in the 1990s in Florida but since then has spread across the USA.

How do you know if a largemouth bass caught is infected with LMBV?

When a largemouth bass is not exhibiting disease signs, it is difficult to determine if the fish is infected with LMBV. Even if a largemouth bass is showing disease signs, there are other fish pathogens that can cause similar disease signs. Genetic testing is needed to confirm LMBV.

Can you eliminate LMBV from a largemouth bass population or a body of water?

There is no known way to eradicate LMBV from a largemouth bass population or from an infected body of water. There are no available treatments for LMBV. Researchers are looking into developing LMBV resistant largemouth bass strains and vaccines.

How do you prevent the spread of LMBV?

Anglers and recreational users of any body of water should assume it is infected and take the following precautions:

- Do not move any fish, alive or dead, or any part of the fish, from the body of water unless for immediate consumption. If cleaning fish, do so at the waterbody where they were caught or at home. Place all fish parts into the trash.
- Place leftover bait into the trash.
- Any watercraft or boat used should be drained of any water before leaving the area. This includes water in bait tanks, bilges, livewells, wash down lines, etc.
- Handle fish you intend to release with care. Stress seems to increase fatality of fish infected with LMBV.

- Any fishing or recreational equipment that contacts water or mud should be rinsed after use, cleaned or dried before leaving the area. Wash gear in hot water and allow it to dry thoroughly before using at a different waterbody.

What happens to a largemouth bass population after a LMBV outbreak?

LMBV outbreaks can vary in length but tend to be days to weeks and resolve on their own. Depending on the severity of the LMBV outbreak, the loss of older and large sized largemouth bass from a population will reduce angling opportunities in the immediate future. However, other cases of LMBV outbreaks have reported largemouth bass populations recovering 3-5 years later to pre-outbreak levels. Once exposed to LMBV, largemouth bass produce antibodies against LMBV and build resistance.

What is CDFW doing about LMBV?

To prevent the spread of LMBV, CDFW is conducting outreach to inform the public and anglers with guidance on how best to stop the spread of LMBV. CDFW is also planning to evaluate different methods to detect LMBV as well as evaluating options to implement a surveillance program.

Please report any significant largemouth bass mortalities to your CDFW regional office.