

Whirling Disease

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division has confirmed the presence of whirling disease in some hatchery-raised rainbow trout. This is the first documented occurrence of whirling disease in Georgia.

Whirling Disease Identification



Deformed skeletons of 8-month old rainbow trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss) with whirling disease. Credit: USGS, Western Fisheries Research Center (Public domain.)

FACTS

- First detected in the U.S. in 1958, this disease is found in more than 20 states. Whirling disease can cause 90 percent or greater mortality of young rainbow trout and can have serious impacts to wild and hatchery trout populations.
- The disease is caused by the microscopic parasite *Myxobolus cerebralis*, which damages cartilage and skeletal tissue in trout causing diseased fish to swim in a "whirling" motion.
- While often fatal to juvenile trout, the disease is not known to affect humans or pets, and eating an infected fish is not known to cause any harmful effects.
- The pathogen can cause high trout mortalities in hatchery systems and in the wild. There are no therapeutic treatments to eliminate this pathogen.

WHAT WRD IS DOING TO PREVENT SPREAD:

- Suspending trout stocking from Buford Hatchery and Summerville Hatchery until their disease status is confirmed by additional diagnostic tools.
- Collecting wild trout samples for disease analysis from the Chattahoochee River downstream of Buford Hatchery. Collecting trout and water source samples for testing at Summerville Hatchery.
- Collecting trout samples from Buford Hatchery to be tested by the federal fish disease lab at the Warm Springs Fish Health Center.

FUTURE PREVENTION STEPS:

- Identify the source(s) of the pathogen.
- Documenting the presence/absence of whirling disease in wild fish upstream of Burton Trout Hatchery and the Chattahoochee National Fish Hatchery. Summerville Hatchery is spring fed; therefore, its water sources do not contain trout.

- Conducting risk analysis of the potential impacts of stocking our current trout hatchery inventory into streams that do not support naturally reproducing populations.
- Determine the disease status of waterbodies stocked with trout in CY21 and determine the need to test wild trout populations.
- Identify disinfectant methodologies for treating hatchery water supplies and equipment.

WHAT ANGLERS CAN DO TO HELP:

- **DO** take photos and video of the fish, including close ups of its spine.
- **DO** note where it was caught (waterbody, landmarks, or GPS coordinates).
- **DO** properly clean all equipment such as boats, trailers, waders, boots, float tubes and fins of mud before leaving an area when fishing. Thoroughly dry equipment in the sun if possible before reuse. If you are traveling directly to other waters, clean your equipment with a 10 percent solution of chlorine bleach or use another set of equipment.
- **DON'T** transport live fish between bodies of water or release or dispose of them anywhere other than the location they were caught
- **E-mail** If you observe the symptoms of IHNV in fish. Notify the Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division at trout@dnr.ga.gov.

For more information on fish disease, visit: <https://georgiawildlife.com/ans#diseases>