

PRESS RELEASE

August , 2026 – For immediate release

Whirling disease, an aquatic invasive parasite in the Columbia River Watershed

Whirling disease was first detected in British Columbia December of 2023 in the Columbia River Watershed. Containment and prevention of this disease is now critical.

Best practices for preventing the spread of whirling disease

- Never move fish or fish parts between water bodies
- Use fish cleaning stations and dispose of fish parts in local solid waste systems; do not dispose of fish parts down a drain
- ‘Clean, Drain, Dry’ all watercraft and equipment
- Decontaminate all watercraft and equipment leaving waterbodies in the Columbia River Watershed
- ‘Pull the Plug’ when transporting watercraft, it’s the law

Whirling Disease Facts

It is caused by the microscopic parasite *Myxobolus cerebralis*, which targets juvenile fish in the Salmonidae family. The parasite damages the brain stem and spinal cord, resulting physical deformities and the “whirling” swimming pattern. Whirling disease can cause significant mortality in fish populations, such as trout, salmon, and whitefish. Eating infected fish or swimming in its waters will **not** cause harmful effects to humans or pets.



Infected rainbow trout showing characteristic black tail.
Photo credit: Sascha Hallett

If you spot a fish showing signs of whirling disease, please do not remove or transport it. Instead, report it by submitting photos to the province at whirlingdisease@gov.bc.ca.

Provincial Recommended Decontamination Protocol for Whirling Disease in the Columbia Watershed

There is currently no treatment for whirling disease, so containment and prevention is critical. Within the Columbia River Watershed the public should decontaminate all watercraft, equipment and gear using the provincial protocol to prevent the spread.

Quaternary Ammonium Compounds (QAC), such as Quat Plus, is the recommended cleaning agent for whirling disease. Prepare items for decontamination by removing all plant material and mud. Smaller items should be fully submerged in a QAC concentration for at least 10 minutes. Larger items must be sprayed with the QAC concentration and kept damp for at least 10 minutes. Once complete, all components can be rinsed off with clean water (not the water body just removed from). Used QAC can be disposed in a residential drain while flushing with an equal volume of water or organic soils away from a waterbody. After decontamination and rinsing, all watercraft and equipment should be allowed to dry for at least 24 hours.

Our Collective Responsibility - “Clean, Drain, Dry”

To prevent further spread of all aquatic invasive species, water users are asked to ‘Clean, Drain, Dry’ all types of watercrafts and associated gear before moving between water bodies. **‘Clean’** any debris, plant matter, and mud from boats and trailers. **‘Drain’** all water from holding tanks and compartments on land. **‘Dry’** all parts of your watercraft and gear completely, including waders, lifejackets, and water toys. The province recommends a minimum of 24 hours drying before entering another waterbody.

For media inquiries or more information, please contact: Robyn Hooper, Executive Director