

# Keep Fish Disease Out

A guide to protecting freshwater fish stocks from Spring Viraemia of Carp



An Roinn Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe



Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
www.dard.gov.uk

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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE  
Environment and Rural Affairs Department



Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

# ILLEGALLY IMPORTED FISH INTRODUCE SVC TO THE UK DON'T BUY SMUGGLED FISH

## What is Spring Viraemia of Carp?

Spring Viraemia of Carp or SVC is a contagious viral disease of carp and other fish of the cyprinid family (goldfish, roach, rudd, tench) pike and Wels catfish. The disease generally develops as water temperatures rise above 7°C – hence the name spring viraemia. There is no cure for the disease.

Fish of all ages are susceptible if they have not previously been exposed to the virus. The UK is normally free of SVC so our fish are very vulnerable to it.

Diseased fish could destroy your fishery, ruin your sport and cause you financial loss. More details about the disease, its causes and symptoms are given in the Frequently Asked Questions section.

## Keeping SVC out

There are strict rules governing movements of live fish into the UK. They are intended to prevent the introduction of SVC and other fish diseases which have the potential to wipe out entire stocks.

Under the rules, carp and other susceptible coarse fish coming from another Member State of the European Union must be certified by the relevant



Official Services to originate from:

**A territory which is considered free from SVC or from a farm that's been tested for at least two years by the competent authority with all tests giving a negative result.**

Furthermore, the consignment must also satisfy conditions intended to prevent the introduction of the other serious



salmonid diseases Viral Haemorrhagic Septicaemia, Infectious Haematopoietic Necrosis and Gyrodactylosis caused by *Gyrodactylus salaris*.

There are similar rules for imports from Third World Countries (outside the European Union).

Further information on the rules for importing live fish can be found in the booklets: *Combating Fish Disease* and *A Guide to Importing Fish*. These are available free of charge or can be downloaded from:

**<http://defraweb/fish/fishfarm/index.htm>**

### **What to do if you suspect fish have SVC?**

SVC is a notifiable disease in the UK so you are required by law to notify the relevant authorities immediately – in England and Wales the Fish Health Inspectorate on 01305 206673/4, in Scotland the Fisheries Research Services on 01224 876544 and in Northern Ireland the Fisheries Inspectors on 02890 523491.



If after investigation the disease is confirmed, movement restrictions will be imposed on the farm, fishery or other water body. This is to ensure that infected fish, or those carrying the virus, do not pass it on to fish elsewhere. While movement restrictions are in place it is an offence to move fish to or from the site without the prior consent of the relevant authorities.

Movement restrictions remain in place until the affected fishery is cleaned, disinfected and fallowed or tests show that the fishery is free of the disease for a minimum of two years followed by two years of negative testing.

### **Prevention is the only protection**

Everyone involved in fishing activities can help prevent SVC in the UK. Here's how:

- **Help stop illegal imports** – If you suspect that fish are being imported illegally, let the relevant authorities know at once. In England and Wales the 24-hour hotline number is 01305 206681. In Scotland 01224 876544 and in Northern Ireland 02890 523491.
- **Buy fish only from a reputable supplier**, making sure you know where they come from and obtain assurances that they are free from disease.
- **When buying imported fish**, ensure that they have the proper health certification.

- **You must obtain written consent from the Environment Agency if you're planning to stock fish in your fishery** whether they are imported or of UK origin. Their *Buyer Beware* leaflet has further information and you can obtain a copy from your local Agency office.

### **It's up to you!**

Our fish health rules aim to prevent fish diseases entering this country. However, no system can be foolproof or provide complete guarantees. Some still try to flout the rules and smuggle carp and other coarse fish into the country. If you are buying fish from abroad or within this country, it is your duty to establish the origin of the fish and ensure that they are disease free and can be legally introduced.

For further information, please see the booklet *Combating Fish Disease* or contact the relevant authorities. Please see back panel for details.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What are the origins of SVC?**

Formerly known as "Infectious Dropsy of Carp", the disease was renamed SVC in 1971 following the first isolation of its causative virus, Rhabdovirus carpio, from clinically



infected carp in Yugoslavia. The SVC virus was first confirmed in Great Britain in 1977 by scientists at CEFAS (formerly the Fish Diseases Laboratory) in Weymouth. **Most outbreaks of SVC in the UK are believed to have originated from imported fish.**

### **Does SVC affect carp only?**

SVC affects common carp (including all variants, such as mirror, leather and koi carp), grass carp, bighead carp, silver carp, crucian carp, goldfish, orfe, pike, roach, rudd, tench and Wels catfish. Fish of all ages are susceptible if previously unexposed to the virus.

The disease is transmitted from fish to fish by contact. Carrier fish spread the virus through their faeces, urine, reproductive fluids or external mucus secretions.

### **When does it occur?**

SVC outbreaks generally develop as water temperatures rise above 7°C, i.e. in spring. Most deaths occur between 10°C and 15°C. Above 17°C, deaths reduce significantly. Above 23°C, death is rare but the virus can remain viable within the fish.

### **How do I recognise the disease?**

Signs of the disease vary but can include darkening of the skin, swollen eyes, abdominal swelling (dropsy), pale gills, trailing faecal casts and protrusion of the anus.

Infected fish may be lethargic and show signs of bleeding from the gills and skin. They tend to gather in the margins and around inlets and feeder streams. Of course, not all suspicious deaths are caused by SVC. Virus isolation in the laboratory is needed to confirm the disease.

## What's the cure?

There isn't one! The only protection from SVC is prevention. There is no treatment or licensed vaccine available in the UK.

## How can I protect my fishery from SVC?

Fishery owners and managers must be sure that any fish introduced are free of disease. One "bargain" fish may cost you the stock and reputation of your fishery. Follow the advice set out in Defra's advisory booklet *Combating Fish Disease* and these sensible precautions:

- Ask about the origin of fish you are buying
- Ask to see documented proof if necessary
- Ask for details of any relevant health checks undertaken on the fish
- If you are importing fish, follow the import rules
- If in any doubt at all, do not buy
- Liaise with your local Environment Agency office or the relevant Fish Health Inspectorate

## What must I do if I suspect my fishery is infected with SVC?



If you suspect the presence of SVC, or any other notifiable disease, then you must inform the Fish Health Inspectorate (England and Wales), Fisheries Research Services (Scotland) or Fisheries Inspectors (Northern Ireland). Please see back panel.

## **What happens if SVC is found at my fishery?**

A Designated Area Order (DAO) will be made to control all movements of live fish or eggs to and from the site. This normally means that no fish will be allowed off site, but fish may be allowed on site if permission is granted after discussion with the Fish Health Inspectorate.

We will not stop angling at the fishery but we would advise against using keep-nets. We would recommend the use of disinfectant net dips to limit the risk of anglers and angling tackle spreading the disease to other fisheries.

## **SVC kills only a few fish so why bother about it?**

This is not true. An SVC outbreak in a lake is likely to kill 80% of susceptible fish. Carp, of all ages and sizes, are particularly susceptible to the disease. Some lakes in past outbreaks have lost 100% of their carp stocks. This is why it is vital to check the origin and disease history of fish you plan to buy. Movement restrictions placed on infected sites can have a severe effect on businesses, both in terms of the restriction on selling fish and the loss of revenue from anglers.

## **SVC is widespread in this country so why bother trying to control it?**

There is no evidence to suggest SVC is widespread. Despite outbreaks in recent years only a small number of sites are at present designated for SVC. All these are enclosed waters and represent a very small percentage of fisheries in the UK.

# WHAT IS THE UK DOING TO CONTROL THE DISEASE?

## Controlling SVC in existing UK stocks

We make routine checks on producers of carp and other susceptible species to test for the presence of SVC. We follow up all reports of suspected SVC, whether in farms or fisheries, and fully investigate abnormal deaths.

Where we find SVC, we control movements off the site to contain the disease.

## Preventing SVC entering the country

We widely publicise the rules on importing fish and enforce them.

We make full use of the powers we have to check and intercept consignments on arrival or at the port or airport.

We have a full time Fish Health Inspector who concentrates on the investigation into and prevention of illegal imports.

We take any reports of illegal consignments seriously and have made successful prosecutions.

## For Information and Advice

The bodies listed below can give further advice



on SVC and general fish health matters including import rules, and practical guidance on cleaning and disinfecting fishing tackle and clothing. You should also report to them any

suspected illegal imports or abnormal deaths in fish stocks.

## **Illegally imported fish can introduce disease**

**If you suspect fish are being illegally imported TELL US**

**Check the origin of fish you buy**

**If you import fish TELL US if you have doubts about the health certificates OR if the fish appear diseased**



### **Please contact: England and Wales**

Fish Health Inspectorate  
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture  
Science (CEFAS)  
Weymouth Laboratory  
Barrack Road  
The Nothe  
Weymouth  
Dorset DT4 8UB  
Tel: 01305 206673/4  
Fax: 01305 206602  
E-mail: [fish.health.inspectorate@cefas.co.uk](mailto:fish.health.inspectorate@cefas.co.uk)  
Website: [www.efishbusiness.com](http://www.efishbusiness.com)

### **Scotland**

Fisheries Research Services  
Marine Laboratory  
PO Box 101, Victoria Road  
Aberdeen AB11 9DB  
Tel: 01224 876544  
Fax: 01224 295620  
E-mail: [fishhealth@marlab.ac.uk](mailto:fishhealth@marlab.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.frs-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.frs-scotland.gov.uk)

## **For policy advice please contact:**

### **England and Wales**

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Fisheries Division IIA  
Area 5E  
3-8 Whitehall Place  
London SW1A 2HH  
Tel: 020 7270 8826  
Fax: 020 7270 8827  
E-mail: [sh.fishii@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sh.fishii@defra.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

### **Welsh Assembly Government**

Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Division 2  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ  
Tel: 02920 823567  
Fax: 02920 823562  
E-mail: [fisheries@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fisheries@wales.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website:  
[www.countryside.wales.gov.uk/fisheries](http://www.countryside.wales.gov.uk/fisheries)

### **Scotland**

Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs  
Department (SEERAD)  
Pentland House  
47 Robb's Loan  
Edinburgh EH14 1TW  
Tel: 0131 244 6225  
Fax: 0131 244 6552  
E-mail: [carrol.herbertson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carrol.herbertson@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

### **Northern Ireland**

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Fisheries Division  
Annexe 5, Castle Grounds  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast  
BT4 3PW  
Tel: 02890 523491  
Fax: 02890 523121  
E-mail: [Nigel.quinn@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:Nigel.quinn@dardni.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk)

Other booklets are available from the addresses on previous pages 10 and 11:

*A Guide to Importing Fish*

*Combating Fish Disease*

*A Guide to Shellfish Health Controls*

*Keep Fish Disease Out – A Guide to Protecting Fish Stocks from Gyrodactylus salaris*

For advice on the rules for introducing fish into inland waters in England and Wales, please telephone the Environment Agency general enquiry line on 0645 333 111. Your call will be directed to your nearest Environment Agency office. For more detailed information, please contact:

National Fisheries Laboratory  
Environment Agency  
Bromholme Lane, Brampton  
Huntingdon  
Cambridgeshire PE28 4NE

Tel: 01480 414581

Fax: 01480 433873

E-mail:

**[nflfishhealth@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:nflfishhealth@environment-agency.gov.uk)**

For advice on the introduction of fish into inland water in Scotland please contact David Dunkley at the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD).