



Shawn Good - VFWD

*Infected gills of a white crappie from Lake Champlain*

## Columnaris Disease *Flexibacter columnaris*



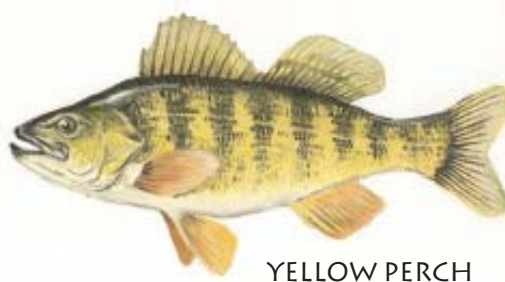
Columnaris is a common bacterial disease that infects a wide variety of freshwater fishes. This disease is annually documented in Vermont particularly in spawning fish populations such as, but not limited to, crappie, perch and bluegill. Common names for this condition are cotton-wool disease, saddleback, and mouth fungus. Frequently, this disease is mistaken for a fungus because of its cottony appearance on a fish. All freshwater fishes are susceptible to this disease.

# VERMONT FISH HEALTH FACT SHEET

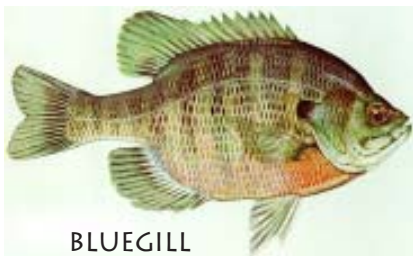
### Physical Description

This bacterium first invades the skin on the head region of the body, including the mouth, lips, cheeks, gill covers, fins and gills. Anywhere an injury occurs on the body can result in an infection site.

The earliest sign of columnaris disease is a thickening of the mucus at various spots on the head, gill covers, fins and in and around injuries. The mucus continues to become thicker until definite areas of skin involvement appear as circular areas of fluffy, grayish growth. Fins affected by this disease usually have lesions on the outer edges of the fin which progress down the fin towards the body.



YELLOW PERCH



BLUEGILL  
DOI/FWS-DUANE RAVER

### Threat to Fish

Columnaris often kills fish by damaging their gills. In cases of columnaris in which gill damage is minimal, enough healthy gill tissue will remain to support life. In heavy infections, the bacteria may invade the blood stream through gill or skin lesions. The disease is usually lethal within a relatively short time following this type of infection.

### Threat to Humans

Columnaris is not known to infect humans.

# VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

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