

THE TORONTO STAR

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EDITORIALS AND LETTERS

Fish disease unlike mad cow disease

Re the Aug. 28 article and interview concerning *Streptococcus iniae* infections in humans, 'Brand new' fish infection hits 7 people. It is with great dismay that I read that Dr. Donald Low of Mount Sinai and Princess Margaret hospitals refers to this infection as "mad fish disease."

Someone in Low's position must surely realize the dangers of such sensationalism.

"Mad cow disease" (Bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE) affects the brain tissues of ruminants and is caused by a prion. *Streptococcus iniae*, a bacterial infection, can cause a meningoencephalitis in fish, a quite different disease.

In addition, exophthalmia ("bulging eyes") and erratic swimming behavior are common, non-specific signs of many fish diseases. *Streptococcus iniae* is not a "mad fish disease," and is in no way analogous to BSE in cattle and sheep.

Letter Of The Day

Second, food-borne potential pathogens are commonly isolated from many animal products. *E. coli* contamination of beef and salmonella contamination of poultry are two examples. However, common-sense practices, such as thorough cooking, proper food handling, and good personal hygiene are everyday procedures that remove much of the risk of food poisoning.

Proper handling of fish is as important as the proper handling of other animal food products. *Streptococcus iniae* infections in humans are avoided the same way we avoid other potential sources of food-borne disease and, as such, is not particularly outstanding.

Finally, *Streptococcus iniae* was first detected in freshwater dolphins. However, like people, dolphins are mammals, not fish as you stated.

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Fish infection not restricted to tilapia

Re the Aug. 28 article 'Brand new' fish infection hits 7 people. While most of the infected people were cleaning tilapia, this bacterium can infect any other freshwater fish.

Also, the discovery of this bacterium in the 1970s didn't hinder the culture of tilapia, trout or salmon.

Furthermore, the bacteria's spread to humans is not going to have a major impact on the aquaculture industry, but it will certainly motivate the Ontario aquaculturists to find the right solutions to produce healthy tilapia for the Toronto market.

This is because after the legal culture of tilapia in Ontario was approved in 1995, several projects are now attempting the production of tilapia with capital-intensive recirculating systems and one company plans to market 100,000 pounds in July, 1997.

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