



## Alerting Divers to the Threat of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease

**October 20, 2019 – As a new coral disease spreads to Caribbean coral reefs, divers can be on the alert and play a role in assisting local managers by sharing underwater photos and helping prevent spread of the disease.**

Since 2014, the Florida Reef Tract has been severely impacted by a newly documented coral disease which scientists are calling “stony coral tissue loss disease” because it affects only hard stony corals and is characterized by the rapid loss of live coral tissue. The disease spread rapidly across coral reefs from Palm Beach to the lower Florida Keys and in the last year has been reported elsewhere in the Caribbean, including in Mexico, Jamaica, Sint Maarten, the Dominican Republic, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Belize and Sint Eustatius.

A learning exchange about the coral disease was recently held with representatives from 17 Caribbean countries and territories in the Florida Keys. Among the lessons shared is that early detection of the disease and its correct identification is essential to permit actions to monitor, treat, rescue and restore affected corals. Another key lesson learned is that managers must join forces with communities to help respond to this serious new threat to coral reefs.

MPAConnect, a partnership between the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute and NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program, worked with Caribbean coral reef managers to develop new outreach materials about stony coral tissue loss disease. Two new posters are designed to make divers aware of the disease.



“By being on the alert, divers can act as eyes on the reef and collaborate with their local managers to help in the detection and monitoring of stony coral tissue loss disease,” explained Ms. Emma Doyle, MPAConnect Coordinator.

“The spread of the disease can also be prevented by some simple no-cost actions and by being a responsible diver in the face of this new threat. The help of the community is invaluable as managers work to respond to this coral disease.”

The posters are available online in English, Spanish and French. Go to <https://www.gcfi.org/emerging-issues-florida-coral-disease-outbreak/> to download printable posters or smaller files for electronic sharing. The new materials are made possible through support from NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Fund and the US National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. For more information please contact [mpaconnect@gcfi.org](mailto:mpaconnect@gcfi.org).