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In the laboratory, the collected fish specimens were sacrificed, and the external body surface, including scales, gills, fins, and operculum, were examined with the use of the naked eye and a dissecting microscope for the presence of external parasites. The scales were crushed carefully by a scalpel to identify any macroscopic lesions or cysts. In addition, the fish were dissected from the anus ventrally along the middle of the abdomen to the mouth in order to expose the internal organs. Two lateral incisions were done in order to expose the body cavity, alimentary canal, and other internal organs, and all were examined for the presence of macroscopic organisms.

Tissue extract preparation for virus isolation

The brain, spleen, and kidney tissue samples were aseptically collected from infected tilapia exhibiting clinical signs. The tissue was mixed in L-15 media and aseptically homogenized. Later, the suspension was subjected to clarification *via* refrigerated centrifugation at 4,000 × g for 15 minutes. A 0.22 µm membrane filter (Millipore, USA) was used to filter the supernatants in order to eliminate any possible bacterial contamination and cell debris. The clarified tissue extracts from both infected and non-infected tilapia were then inoculated onto DRG monolayers in 25 cm^2 culture flasks.