



Blue–Green Algae Blooms in Connecticut Lakes and Ponds

FACT SHEET

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Connecticut Department of Public Health
Environmental Health Section
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Blue-green algae blooms have raised concerns in Connecticut and across the nation. These blooms are sometimes considered harmful due to the potential to cause health effects in people exposed to the tainted water. The purpose of this fact sheet is to raise awareness of potential risks of exposure to these blooms among those using Connecticut's lakes and ponds for recreation.



What are blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae are simple organisms that exist naturally in marine waters, rivers, lakes, and ponds. Despite their name, blue-green algae are actually types of bacteria known as Cyanobacteria. These organisms can reproduce rapidly and a dense growth of these organisms is called a bloom.

What causes these organisms to form "blooms"?

In Connecticut, blooms occur in summer and early fall because the abundant light, high water temperature and nutrient content increase the chance for bloom formation. Under the right conditions a large bloom can form overnight.

What does a bloom look like?

Blue-green algae blooms can appear (or disappear) rapidly. Blooms can also disappear underwater or move to different parts of a pond or lake. Be mindful of any unusual look to the lake including a bright green color, abundant pea soup-like scum, or spilled paint-like appearance. Sometimes thick mats of algae are washed onshore.

Why should I be aware of blue-green algae blooms?

Some blue-green algae produce toxins that could pose a health risk to people and animals when they are exposed to them in large enough quantities. Exposure occurs when surface scums or water containing blue-green algae are ingested, contact the skin, or when airborne droplets containing toxins are inhaled while swimming, boating, and skiing. Symptoms of low-level exposure are short-lived and include; "allergic" type reactions, acute intestinal or respiratory problems, and skin irritations. However, swallowing relatively large amounts of the tainted water can cause serious illness such as liver damage and nervous system effects.

How can I prevent exposure to these toxins?

When you see an algae bloom, the safest course of action to take is to stay away from the water. Pay attention to posted advisories that limit recreational activities in and around a bloom. It is most important that pets and children are kept away from blue-green algae blooms as they may be less inclined to avoid contact with the tainted water.

Whom can I contact to report a blue-green algae bloom or to get more information about surface water quality?

For health questions call the Environmental Health Section's Public Beach Program at the Connecticut Department of Public Health: (860) 509-7758. For information about beach closings and advisories, or to report a bloom, call your local health department or contact the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection at (860) 424-3020.

If you require aid/accommodation in order to fully and fairly enjoy this publication, please call 860-509-8000 and ask to be connected with the related program.