Q: What about other outdoor activities?

Camping, picnicking, hiking, biking, bird watching and other activities that do not involve water contact are encouraged.

Q: My drinking water comes from a water source that is affected by algae blooms. Am I at risk?

People who draw water directly from an affected water body are advised that it may be dangerous to drink. If you or your drinking water supplier uses water from an affected source, call and ask if the water has been tested. If it has not been tested, it is recommended that you use an alternative water source not affected by the bloom.

Q: What are state public health officials doing about harmful algae blooms?

The Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division has received federal funds to set up a Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance (HABS) program that will help the division and its partners get a better understanding of where and how blooms are occurring and their impact on human health.

Q: Where can I get more information?

Visit the HABS Web site at www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hab/. You may also call 971-673-0440 or e-mail us at Hab.health@state.or.us.

This document can be provided upon request in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities. Other formats may include (but are not limited to) large print, Braille, audio recordings, Web-based communications and other electronic formats. E-mail dhs.forms@state.or.us, call 971-673-0440 to arrange for the alternative format that will work best for you.

DHS
Oregon Department of Human Services

DHS: PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Harmful algae blooms:
a public health concern

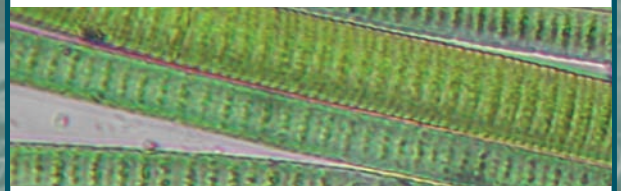
DHS | Independent. Healthy. Safe.

Q: What is an algae bloom?

Algae are microscopic organisms that grow naturally in oceans and fresh waters. Under certain conditions, some algae can grow into a large visible mass called a bloom.

Q: Why are algae blooms a health concern?

Not all blooms are harmful, but some species of algae, such as cyanobacteria or blue-green algae, can produce toxins or poisons that can cause serious illness or death in pets, livestock, wildlife and humans.



Q: How will I know if a toxic algae bloom is present?

Algae blooms appear as thick foam or scum on the water's surface. They can be bright green, blue-green, white or brown in color. Unfortunately, you cannot tell if an algae bloom is toxic just by looking at it. If you come across areas of thick algae, take precaution by avoiding water contact and keeping pets out of the water.

Q: What are the health risks posed by exposure to toxic algae?

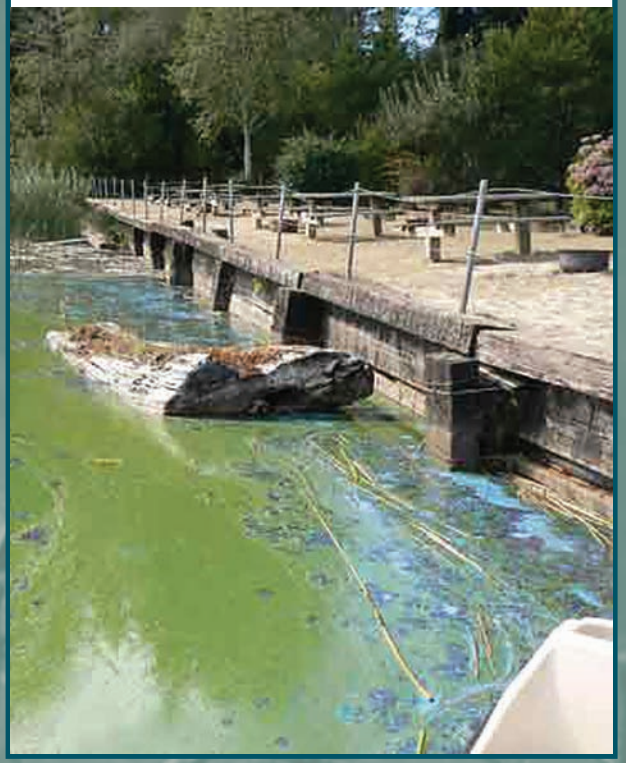
Skin irritation or rash is the most commonly reported health effect. Other symptoms range from diarrhea, cramps and vomiting to fainting, numbness, dizziness, tingling and paralysis. The most severe reactions occur when large amounts of water are swallowed. The chronic effects of long-term exposure to algae toxins are being studied.

Q: How can I protect myself when I am camping or recreating at a lake where a bloom is in process?

Stay out of the affected water. Keep children and pets away. Never drink or cook with the affected water. If you come in contact with the affected water, wash off thoroughly with another source of water.

Q: Can I treat algae-affected water to make it safe?

No. Personal water filtration devices that may be purchased in outdoor recreational stores have not been proven to be effective. Boiling water will not remove the toxins.

Q: Is it safe to eat fish?

Fish caught in affected waters pose unknown health risks. If you choose to eat them, remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking because toxins are more likely to collect in these tissues.