

Harmful Algal Blooms

Harmful algal blooms can produce toxins that may be dangerous to people, animals, and the environment. Learn what harmful algal blooms are, and how you and your pets can avoid them.

Harmful algal blooms occur when numerous types of bacteria (known as cyanobacteria) grow in fresh, brackish, or marine waters. Under certain conditions and with adequate nutrients, some of these bacteria can quickly reproduce and grow into large, visible blooms that may produce harmful toxins. Harmful algal blooms are often referred to as: cyanobacteria, blue-green algae, golden algae, or simply "algae".



Signs of Harmful Algal Blooms

- Bright green, blue, brown, or red color to the water, it may appear as if paint is floating on the water.
- Cloudy water; toxins may persist for days after the water becomes clear.
- Very bad odor, similar to a sewer smell or rotten eggs.
- Dead plants and/or fish.

Effects of Harmful Algal Blooms

Harmful algal blooms produce toxins that can make people and animals sick. They also block sunlight or use up a vast amount of oxygen in a body of water, which kills fish and plants. Harmful algal bloom toxins have caused the shutdown of the water supply in a major U.S. city, killed wildlife and pets, and sickened people with a variety of skin, breathing, neurological, and stomach symptoms.

Health Effects of Exposure to Harmful Algal Bloom Toxins May Include:

- Skin rashes on contact with contaminated water.
- Diarrhea and vomiting, if contaminated water is ingested.
- Harm to the liver, kidneys, or nervous system, if the toxin levels are very high.



Harmful algal blooms have occurred in every region of the U.S. In 2014, 38 states responded to a survey about harmful algal blooms, and more than half reported that such blooms occur every year in a freshwater body. All coastal states have reported harmful algal blooms in marine waters, and these blooms also have been reported in all of the Great Lakes. Evidence suggests harmful algal blooms are increasing in number and severity because of changing temperatures, farming practices, storm water runoff, and wastewater overflows.

Protect yourself by checking algal bloom advisories that may be posted online or on signs near the water. Follow local or state guidance if you learn about a harmful algal bloom in a local water body or if you are notified that your tap water contains algal toxins.

To learn more about harmful algal blooms, please visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [California Department of Public Health](#) or the [State Water Resources Control Board](#).