



Department of Health
Department of Natural Resources
Environmental Protection Agency

Harmful Algal Blooms

BE AWARE

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What is a Harmful Algal Bloom?

A harmful algal bloom (HAB) is a rapidly growing population of algae-like cyanobacteria that causes visible bursts of color in a water body. While other types of blooms can occur, a "harmful" bloom refers to an event where the organisms release toxins (cyanotoxins) into the water. There are many types of cyanotoxins, some cause liver or nervous system damage.

How dangerous are HABs?

HABs can release a wide variety of cyanotoxins that cause different symptoms and are contracted in different ways. Drinking, touching or accidentally breathing in water contaminated with HABs can all lead to HAB-related illnesses. Symptoms of HAB-related illness includes diarrhea, vomiting, irritated skin, dizziness, light-headedness and allergic reactions. Pets and livestock can become sick by drinking water or by licking fur after swimming in a contaminated water supply.

How will I know if there is a HAB?

There is no sure way to distinguish HABs from blooms of other algae types. Instead, you should keep an eye out for all algal blooms. Look for abnormal colors (green to white to black), textures (film, crusts, puffballs) and patterns (clippings, dots, streaks). Some HABs look like spilled paint, pea soup, foam, wool, streaks or green cottage cheese curds.

How can I reduce HAB exposure risk?

- To check current beach advisories, use the BeachGuard app at publicapps.odh.ohio.gov/beachguardpublic.
- Avoid prolonged exposure to any oddly colored or smelling water.
- After swimming or wading in lake water, even where no HABs are visible, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Never swallow, drink or cook with lake water regardless if HABs are visible.
- Follow HAB advisories posted at beaches and boat ramps.
- Do not let your children or pets play in HAB debris on the shore. See a doctor if you or your children exhibit signs of a HAB-related illness.
- Do not let pets lick HAB material from their fur, drink water with HABs, or eat HAB material. See a veterinarian if your pet appears ill.
- In the case of a human or pet HAB-related illness, please contact your local health district. Use the ODH search tool to find your LHD: odhgateway.odh.ohio.gov/lhdinformationssystem/Directory/GetMyLHD.



Where can I learn more on health effects?

For more information on possible health effects of HABs, visit odh.ohio.gov/habs.

What about fishing and other activities?

Avoid fish caught from contaminated water. If you plan to eat the fish you catch, trim off the skin and fat, and remove the guts and liver. Discard the fat and skin, and rinse fillets in tap water before cooking.

Other activities near the water such as camping, picnicking, biking and hiking are safe. Always wash your hands before eating, but especially if you have had contact with lake water or shore debris.

For general HAB information and forms to report HAB locations, please go to ohioalgaeinfo.com