

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT for this Release:

Krista Dommer, Public Information and Communication Coordinator
Office Phone: (209) 468-3571, Email: kdommer@sjcphs.org

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE HEALTH CONCERNS FOR HUMANS AND ANIMALS

Health officials urge caution

STOCKTON, CA (August 6, 2019) – Warm temperatures are here and when conditions are right, blue-green algae can rapidly build-up or bloom on the surface of reservoirs, rivers, creeks, lagoons, lakes and ponds. Environmental Health and Public Health officials are urging swimmers, boaters, and recreational water users to avoid contact with blue-green algae (BGA), also known as cyanobacteria. The algae blooms may produce toxins that can present a health hazard to humans and animals. San Joaquin County Public Health Officer, Dr. Kismet Baldwin advises, “The best way to avoid illness is to exercise caution and observe signage that warns visitors to avoid active algal blooms.”

The algae blooms can look like green, blue-green, white, or brown foam and scum floating on the water. Children are especially vulnerable because they play on the shoreline, drink more water than adults when swimming, and are of a smaller body size. Dogs are especially vulnerable to BGA poisoning and many dogs are lost each year because they tend to drink more water and lick algae off their fur.

Human Exposure General Health Effects:

- Rashes or other skin irritations
- Allergy-like reactions, runny nose or sore throat
- Toxins ingested in large amounts can cause sharp, severe stomach problems like diarrhea and vomiting, liver damage, numb limbs, tingling fingers and toes or dizziness

Animal Exposure Health Effects:

- Weakness, staggering
- Difficulty breathing
- Convulsions
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- Death, if not treated

Statewide Guidance on Harmful Algae Blooms recommends the following:

- Avoid wading and swimming in water containing visible blooms or water containing algae scum or mats, which are most often present at the shoreline.
- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water or swim through scums, mats, nor lick their fur after going in the water. Wash exposed pets in clean drinking water.
- If no algae scums or mats are visible, you should carefully watch young children and warn them not to swallow the water.
- Do not drink, cook, or wash dishes with untreated water.
- Consume fish only after removing guts and liver, and rinsing fillets in clean drinking water. Mussels should not be consumed.
- Get medical treatment right away if you think you, your pet, or your livestock might have been poisoned by blue-green algae toxins.

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Environmental Health Department staff will be posting Health Advisory signs at local marinas cautioning swimmers, boaters and recreational users to avoid contact with BGA.

CAUTION

**Harmful algae may be present in this water.
For you and your family's safety:**

 <p>Stay away from scum, and cloudy or discolored water.</p>	 <p>Do not let pets and other animals go into or drink the water, or eat scum on the shore.</p>
 <p>Keep children away from algae in the water or on the shore.</p>	 <p>Do not drink this water or use it for cooking.</p>
 <p>For fish caught here, throw away guts and clean fillets with tap water or bottled water before cooking.</p>	 <p>Do not eat shellfish from this water.</p>

❖ **Call your doctor or veterinarian** if you or your pet get sick after going in the water

❖ For more information on harmful algae, go to <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/index.html>

❖ For a listing of locations where harmful algal blooms have been voluntarily reported go to https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/where/freshwater_events.html

The California Water Boards recommends that you practice Healthy Habits while enjoying the outdoors at your local lake, river, or stream. More information on healthy water habits can be found at <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/do/>

For more information, visit:

- California Harmful Algal Bloom Portal <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/do/>
- Report a potential harmful algal bloom at <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/do/bloomreport.html>
- California Water Quality Monitoring Council: <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/index.html>
- California State Water Resources Control Board: <https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/>
- California Department of Public Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DEODC/EHIB/EAS/Pages/HABs.aspx>
- CA Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment: <https://oehha.ca.gov/ecotoxicology/general-info/information-microcystins>
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/habs/index.html>
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: <https://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution/harmful-algal-blooms>

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Attachments:

- #1 - Blue-Green Algae Bloom Frequently Asked Questions (pdf)
- #2 - Caution Notice Flyers, English & Spanish (pdf)

BLUE GREEN ALGAE HEALTH CONCERNS

WHAT ARE BLUE GREEN ALGAE?

Blue green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, are simple plants found naturally in water and wet environments.

WHAT IS A BLUE GREEN ALGAE BLOOM?

When conditions are right, algae can rapidly build up or “bloom” on the surface of reservoirs, rivers, creeks, lagoons, lakes and ponds. The bloom can be green, blue green, white or brown, and may look like a floating layer of scum or paint.

WHAT CAUSES BLOOMS?

Warm temperatures, calm water and nutrients such as fertilizer, manure runoff or septic tank discharges, contribute to the rapid growth of algae. Blooms can occur at any time, but are most common between June and October.

HOW DO I KNOW IF A BLOOM IS TOXIC?

Only a few types of blue green algae are known to produce toxins. Most blooms of algae in our region are made up of harmless green algae. Often, the first sign that a bloom is toxic is a dog that has gotten sick after swimming in stagnant water.

Always look for the signs of an algae bloom before you enter the water, or before you let your children or pets enter the water.

HOW DANGEROUS IS TOXIC ALGAE?

Exposure to toxic algae during recreational activities, by touching the skin or accidentally inhaling or swallowing the water, can cause rashes, skin and eye irritation, sore throat, asthma-like symptoms, allergic reactions, gastrointestinal upset, numbness, tingling, dizziness and other effects. The long-term effects of these exposures are not well known, but children and pets are at greatest risk. Dogs can be exposed to high levels of toxins because they more readily drink water that smells or tastes bad and lick their fur after swimming.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SEE A BLOOM?

- ◆ Stay out of areas where the water has foam, scum, or mats of algae. Keep children, pets and livestock out of such areas at all times. If you or your pets swim or wade in water with algae, rinse off with a clean source of water as soon as possible. Always warn young children not to swallow **any** water, whether or not you see signs of algae.
- ◆ Do not drink or cook with this water. Even if you boil, filter or treat it, the toxins can persist.
- ◆ Get medical treatment right away if you think that you, your family member, pet or livestock might have been poisoned by blue green algae toxins.

WHAT ABOUT FISHING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES?

Eating fish caught during a bloom may pose a health risk. Always remove the guts and liver, and rinse fillets in tap or bottled water before eating the fish. Other activities near the water such as camping, picnicking, biking and hiking are safe.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

California Harmful Algal Bloom Portal
<https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/do/>

Report a potential harmful algal bloom at:
<https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/do/bloomreport.html>

California State Water Resources Control Board:
<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/habs

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
www.epa.gov/gmpo/habpage.html

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Do not let pets and other animals go into or drink the water, or eat scum on the shore.



Keep children away from algae in the water or on the shore.



Do not drink this water or use it for cooking.



For fish caught here, **throw away guts and clean fillets** with tap water or bottled water before cooking.



Do not eat shellfish from this water.

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- ❖ **Call your doctor or veterinarian** if you or your pet get sick after going in the water
 - ❖ For more information on harmful algae, go to <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/index.html>
 - ❖ For a listing of locations where harmful algal blooms have been voluntarily reported go to [https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/where/freshwater events.html](https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/where/freshwater%20events.html)

PRECAUCIÓN

**Puede haber algas dañinas en estas aguas.
Para protección de su familia:**



Puede nadar en estas aguas pero **aléjese de las algas o espuma lamosa** en el agua.



No deje que sus mascotas o animales se metan o beban el agua, o coman la espuma lamosa en la orilla del agua.



Mantenga a los niños alejados de algas en el agua u orilla del agua.



No beba de esta agua o use para cocinar.



Al pescado que pesque aquí, **quítele los intestinos y tírelos a la basura.** Limpie el filete con agua de la llave o embotellada antes de cocinarlo.



No coma mariscos de estas aguas.

- ❖ Llame a su médico o veterinario si usted o su mascota se enferman después de meterse al agua.
- ❖ Para información sobre dañinas, vaya a: <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/index.html>
- ❖ Para obtener una lista de los lugares donde se han informado voluntariamente las floraciones de algas nocivas, vaya a: https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/where/freshwater_events.html