



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

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Use Caution at Beaches and Avoid Blue-Green Algae ‘Blooms’

Warming water conditions and runoff from recent rains can result in the growth of blue-green algae. State health officials want Wisconsin residents to safely enjoy beaches lakes and rivers by avoiding algae blooms.

“Coming in contact with or swallowing water with high levels of blue-green algae poses a health risk and can make you sick,” said Dr. Henry Anderson, State Health Officer. “People and pets should avoid swimming in a body of water with a lot of blue-green algae.”

Algae blooms can look like green paint or pea soup, can form thick, foul-smelling layers on the surface of water and range in color from bluish-green to red. Most adults will avoid entering water with an algae bloom, but kids and pets can be hard to keep out of the water – no matter how it looks or smells.

If an individual comes in contact with blue-green algae, they may experience eye, ear or skin irritation and gastrointestinal problems, such as vomiting or diarrhea. Symptoms can appear between a few hours and several days after exposure. Contact a physician if you experience muscle cramps, respiratory difficulties, nausea or vomiting following swimming in a lake or river.

Individuals can protect themselves, family and pets by avoiding contact with water containing blue-green algae. It is a good idea to wash off after playing or swimming in any lake or river, and especially important to wash hands before eating.

Although there is no requirement for local health departments or physicians to report illnesses related to blue-green algae, each year, the Department of Health Services receives several reports of dog deaths and people with symptoms associated with blue-green algae.

For more information about blue-green algae, visit the CDC’s website at <http://www.cdc.gov/hab/cyanobacteria/default.htm>

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