Staying Safe and Healthy in Wisconsin’s Lakes
What You Need to Know about Blue-Green Algae

With over 15,000 lakes, Wisconsin is a prime destination for summer fun. Learn what you can do to keep your lake visit safe and healthy by protecting yourself and your family from the harmful effects of blue-green algae.

What are blue-green algae?

- Blue-green algae are photosynthetic bacteria known as cyanobacteria and are a natural part of water bodies.
- With enough sunlight and nutrients, cyanobacteria can grow to high levels and form a blue-green algae bloom.
- Blooms are often smelly, look like spilled paint or pea soup, and can change the color of the water to green, blue, turquoise, purple, tan, or white. Some blooms form a layer of scum or mats on the surface of the water.
- While some blooms can stay in the same location for a long time, others can quickly come and go with changing currents and wind patterns. Blooms usually form during the summer months in Wisconsin, or May–September.
- Blue-green algae blooms can produce toxins that can make people and animals sick after they swallow, breathe in, or have contact with the water.

How can I keep myself, my family, and my pets safe at the lake?

- When searching for a spot to swim, choose the clearest water possible. Avoid water that:
  - Looks like spilled latex paint
  - Looks like green pea soup
  - Is discolored or streaky
  - Has small green dots floating in it
  - Has floating scum, globs, or mats
  - Has dead fish or other animals

- Always shower off after swimming in lakes, rivers, and ponds.
- If dogs swim in scummy water, rinse them off with fresh, clean water and don’t let them lick algae off their fur.
- Don’t swim or allow your pets to swim in places where beach closure or water quality notices are posted.
- Try not to swallow the water. Besides blue-green algae, lake, river, and pond water can contain other bacteria and parasites that can make you sick if you swallow it. Always use safe water for drinking!
Do not hallucinate.