



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Aug. 3, 2011

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State Departments of Health and Agriculture Issue Blue-Green Algae Bloom Advisory

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Division, are advising North Dakotans to avoid contact with or swallowing blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, and to protect their pets and livestock, according to Kirby Kruger, director of the Division of Disease Control for the North Dakota Department of Health. The advisory is to remind people that these blooms are common in North Dakota in late summer and exposure to them can cause people and animals to become ill.

“Blue-green algae normally can be found in many lakes in the state,” Kruger said. “Under certain conditions, the blue-green algae can grow into blooms and can produce toxins. Because of the risk of severe illness to people who swallow water containing a harmful algae bloom, we are asking people to be cautious when swimming or boating and refrain from swallowing the water.”

Blue-green algae blooms can produce poisonous cyanotoxins. These toxins have no known antidotes. People, their pets or other animals that swallow water containing a harmful algae bloom can become sick. Symptoms can include severe diarrhea and vomiting; numb lips, tingling fingers and toes, or dizziness; or rashes, hives or skin blisters. Children are at higher risk than adults for illness from harmful algae blooms because they weigh less and can get a relatively larger dose of toxin.

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The Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Division, recommend these steps to avoid exposure to cyanotoxins:

- Don't swim, water ski or boat in areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum or mats of green or blue-green algae on the water.
- If you do accidentally swim in water that might have a cyanobacteria bloom, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Don't let pets or livestock swim in or drink from areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum or mats of algae on the water.
- If pets (especially dogs) swim in scummy water, rinse them off immediately – do not let them lick the algae (and toxins) off their fur.
- Don't irrigate lawns or golf courses with pond water that looks scummy or smells bad.
- Respect any advisories announced by public health authorities.

Blue-green algae blooms occur when organisms that are normally present grow abundantly in lakes and ponds. Blue-green algae blooms can form in warm, standing or slow-moving waters that are rich in nutrients. Faster-moving water bodies like rivers are less susceptible. Blooms can occur at any time, but most often occur in late summer or early fall.

For additional information, contact Kirby Kruger, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4549. For additional information about the effects of blue-green algae blooms on pets and livestock, contact the Animal Health Division, North Dakota Department of Agriculture, at 701.328.2655.

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