

Public Bulletin: Blue-Green Algae

What are Blue-Green Algae

Blue-green algae are common, naturally occurring bacteria, also known as **cyanobacteria**. With warm weather in the summer, blue-green algae blooms may appear in lakes across British Columbia.

What to look for

Lakes with blue-green algae blooms will undergo visible changes – blue-green algae can look like scum, grass clippings, fuzz or globs on the surface of the water. Blue-green algae can be blue-green, greenish-brown, or pinkish-red, and can often smell musty or grassy. However, keep in mind that it is often difficult to distinguish between blue-green algae blooms and other types of algae blooms.

Public health concerns

Some bloom-forming blue-green algae can produce toxins that may result in intestinal discomfort or severe illness if ingested or inhaled. Eating blue-green algae can be fatal to livestock, pets, or wildlife. If contacted, these cyanotoxins may cause skin, nose and eye irritation.

How to protect yourself

- Don't drink or cook with untreated water directly from any lake at any time.
- **Boiling the water will not remove the toxins produced by blue-green algae.**
- During blooms, use bottled water or another safe source of drinking water for all drinking and food preparation.
- Don't swim or wade (or let your pets off-leash) if you see any blue-green algae.
- If you touch any blue-green algae, wash with clean water.

Testing is not always reliable

Weather and wind can make algae blooms move from one part of a lake to another. Because of this, and because of how the level of toxins in blue-green algae change from day to day, testing for toxins is not always a reliable guide to your exposure. Instead, it is safest to assume the blue-green algae blooms contain toxins and follow the precautions on this sheet.

For more information

Call Public Health Protection at 250-565-2150

