

Blue-Green Algae and Dog Safety

What are blue-green algae?

- Blue-green algae are photosynthetic bacteria known as **cyanobacteria** and are a natural part of water bodies in Wisconsin and around the world.
- 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 in Wisconsin, or May–September.
- Blue-green algae blooms can produce toxins, called **cyanotoxins**. Cyanotoxins can make people and animals sick after they swallow, breathe in, or have contact with the water. Many dogs have become sick and some have even died after swallowing water containing cyanotoxins.



 *Keep your pet away from water that is discolored or looks like green pea soup.*

Why are blue-green algae especially harmful to dogs?

- Dogs can't tell whether water is safe to swim or play in.
- When dogs swim and play in water, they tend to swallow water.
- Because dogs have smaller bodies, they can get sick after swallowing just a little bit of unsafe water.

How can I keep my dog safe?

- Choose clear water without noticeable discoloration or surface scum, foam, and algal mats.
- Do not let your dog swim in places where beach closure and water quality notices are posted.
- Supervise your dog at all times. Do not let your dog eat algal scum or mats or lick algae off its fur.
- Always offer fresh, clean water for your dog to drink instead of lake, river, or pond water.
- If you have any doubt about what is in the water, keeping your dog out is the safest thing to do.



How can I spot a blue-green algae bloom?

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

What should I do if my dog goes in water with blue-green algae?

- Immediately wash your dog and yourself with clean water.
- Keep an eye on your dog for sudden signs of poisoning such as:
 - ◆ Vomiting
 - ◆ Diarrhea
 - ◆ Difficulty breathing
 - ◆ Weakness
 - ◆ Seizures
 - ◆ Extreme tiredness
- If your dog develops any symptoms, bring him to a veterinarian immediately.
- Report any blue-green algae related illness to the Wisconsin Division of Public Health by calling 608-266-1120 or completing an online survey at www.dhs.wi.gov and searching “algae”.

How can I report a bloom I see in Wisconsin?

Email the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at DNRHABS@wisconsin.gov to report a bloom and ask questions about blooms and bloom mitigation strategies. When reporting a bloom, be sure to include:

- ◆ Descriptions of bloom size
- ◆ How long the bloom has lasted
- ◆ Location with lake, town, and county name
- ◆ Photos taken both close up and farther away

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Harmful Algal Blooms Program | Go to www.dhs.wi.gov and search “algae”

Wisconsin Department of Health Services | Division of Public Health

