

Blue-green algae

(Cyanobacteria)

What is blue-green algae?

- Also known as “cyanobacteria,” blue-green algae occur naturally in many Alberta lakes. Most of the year, it is present at low levels and is less of a concern. However, warm summer weather allows the organism to increase rapidly or “bloom.”

Why should I avoid blue-green algal blooms?

- Blue-green algae can produce a toxin that may present a health risk to humans and animals.
- Contact with a blue-green algae bloom can cause eye, ear, skin irritation, rashes and allergic reactions.
- Ingesting untreated contaminated water from the lake can cause nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, and liver damage; in high concentrations, the toxin can cause severe illness and death.

What do I do if I come in contact with a blue-green algae bloom?

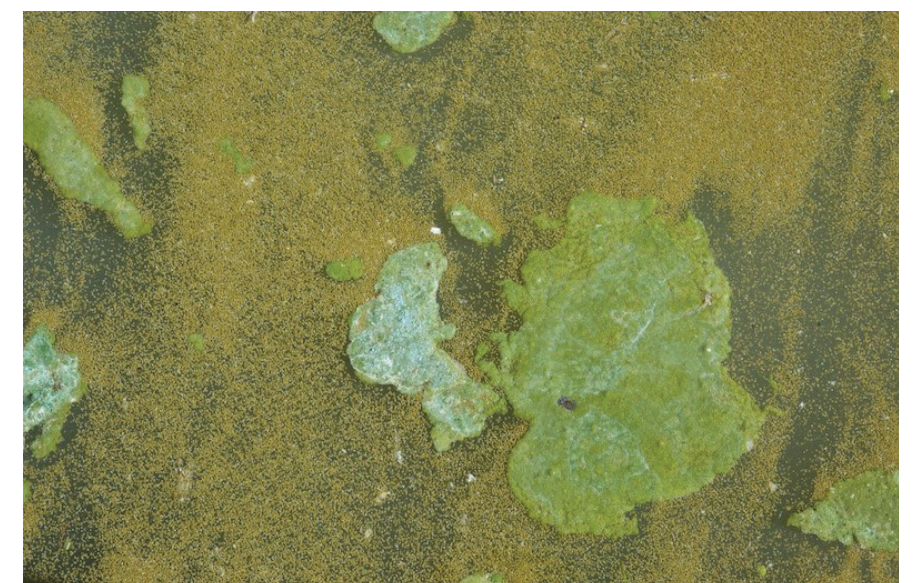
- Shower promptly with clean, treated water. If symptoms develop, call Health Link at 811.

What does a blue-green algal bloom look like?

- Blue-green algae blooms can appear blue-green, green-brown, brown or red/pink. It may look like grass clippings, globules, fuzz balls or paint/pea soup. Decomposing blooms can appear white or purple, and smell of ammonia.
- Blue-green algae blooms are unpredictable, can develop very quickly and can move to other areas of the lake.

How can I protect myself and others?

- Avoid swimming in water with visible blooms. Areas without visible blooms may still be used.
- Do not drink untreated lake water. Boiling the water does not remove or destroy toxins.
- Avoid contact with blue-green algae that has washed up on shorelines.
- Keep children, pets and livestock away from blue-green algal blooms.



4EPHW-12-003 | Created: July 2012 (Revised May 2015)