

Blue-green algal (cyanobacterial) blooms

FACTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Alberta's nutrient-rich lakes, ponds and reservoirs can support blooms of blue-green algae, scientifically known as cyanobacteria, some of which can produce toxins hazardous to people, pets, livestock and wildlife.

Alberta Environment recommends you take precautions with all such blooms.

Blooms are most common on Alberta lakes from early July to mid-September

Blooms can occur under ice during winter or following spring break-up

Blue-green algae tends to have a strong, unpleasant odour

What is a bloom?

A bloom is a relatively rapid migration and concentration of cyanobacteria to the surface of a lake, pond, or reservoir. This forms a dense, soupy mass that can subsequently accumulate near shore and on beaches.

Blooms result from excess nutrients in the water – particularly phosphorus and nitrogen – that stimulate the growth of cyanobacteria.

Some highly concentrated blooms can turn water green, blue-green, yellowish-brown, red or even purple.

Blooms are most common on Alberta lakes from early July to mid-September. Water in a lake with a bloom tends to have a strong and unpleasant odour. As blooms die, they decompose and cause dissolved oxygen levels in the water to be reduced. This can threaten the survival of fish, insects, mussels and clams.

Are cyanobacteria toxic?

Some types of cyanobacteria produce toxins. At high concentrations, these can be harmful to people, domestic animals, and wildlife.

Toxins may be released during the collapse and decay of cyanobacterial blooms.

Toxicity in a lake is temporary, but can last several weeks following a bloom.

If I suspect bloom conditions in a lake or pond, what action do I take?

- Do not drink from any bloom-infested waters.
- Do not wade or swim in waters that have concentrated cyanobacteria.
- Do not let children swim in or drink the water.
- Do not allow pets or domestic animals drink bloom-infested water.
- Provide an alternative source of water for pets and domestic animals.

For information on beach closures, contact your local health region's public health division.

For a list of health regions, visit www.health.alberta.ca/resources/links.html#Regions

What if I suspect a health problem?

Contact your physician immediately if you experience fever, headache, dizziness, stomach cramps, vomiting or sore throat that you suspect may come from contact with an algal bloom.

If your pet or domestic animals show any of these symptoms, contact a veterinarian as soon as possible.