

[INSERT STATE] Is Tracking Harmful Algal Blooms and Associated Illnesses Using CDC’s One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System

The arrival of warm weather brings people to the water for fun in the sun. But it can also bring algal blooms, which can make people and animals sick and damage local environments.

The overgrowth of algae—plant-like organisms in rivers, streams, lakes, and even oceans—can cause a range of problems. Some types of algal blooms are formed by single-celled algae called microalgae, and others are formed by a type of bacteria called cyanobacteria (sometimes called “blue-green algae”). Harmful algal blooms (HABs) occur when microalgae or cyanobacteria produce toxins that can cause illness in humans and animals and damage local environments. [INSERT STATE] is pleased to announce that we will use CDC’s One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System (OHHABS) to track harmful algal blooms that occur in our [lakes and/or coastal waters and/or coastal waterways] and any associated illnesses that occur in humans or animals.

Why are harmful algal blooms an important public health issue?

There is strong evidence that these blooms are happening more often, and causing more harm, due to changing temperatures, farming practices, and storm and wastewater runoff.

In the past decade, hundreds of people and animals have experienced skin, breathing, stomach symptoms from exposures to toxins from harmful algal blooms. The toxins have also killed animals in the United States. The symptoms can differ based on the type of bloom (formed by cyanobacteria or microalgae) and how the person came into contact with the toxin.

Toxin exposure can occur through direct contact (for example, swimming), swallowing (for example, eating contaminated marine fish or shellfish), or breathing in toxins from these blooms.

Harmful algal blooms have started to impact the health [AND/OR] economic well-being of our communities: [INSERT STATE-SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF LOCAL HAB AND ITS NEGATIVE HEALTH OR ECONOMIC EFFECTS].

Tracking Harmful Algal Blooms

Many state and federal agencies are working together to share information about harmful algal blooms, but there is still more to learn. It is important to understand where and how often these blooms and associated illnesses in people and animals occur across the United States. That information will help us understand how to best predict and prevent them. [INSERT STATE-SPECIFIC INFO ON PREVIOUS EFFORTS TO TRACK HABs, IF APPLICABLE].

[INSERT STATE] can already report foodborne and waterborne outbreaks involving people to CDC’s National Outbreak Reporting System (NORS) (<https://www.cdc.gov/nors/about.html>), but until now did not have a way to report about individual people or animals affected by harmful algal blooms. [INSERT STATE] officials will now report information about local harmful blooms and associated illnesses to CDC through OHHABS. This voluntary reporting system collects information on individual cases of illness in people and animals, as well as environmental data about harmful algal blooms. The system exemplifies the One Health approach, which recognizes the connection among human, animal, and environmental health. The approach encourages these health communities to work together to address many linked health challenges more effectively.

What Can You Do?



We can all do our part to help increase awareness about harmful algal blooms and the illnesses they cause. If you see an algal bloom, stay out of the water and keep your pets out, too. If you or your pets do go in water that has an algal bloom, wash yourself and your pets off immediately afterwards with tap water. When you visit a body of water, check for current local or state swimming or fishing advisories. If you have concerns about how the water looks, smells, or tastes, stop using the water and please contact [**INSERT INFO FOR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT**].

OHHABS is intended for use by public health departments and their designated environmental health and animal health partners. If you are a public health, environmental health, or animal health professional interested in reporting to OHHABS, please contact [**INSERT STATE NAME'S**] OHHABS Reporting Site Administrator at [**INSERT CONTACT INFO**].

