Physician Reference

Cyanobacteria blooms. *When in doubt, it’s best to stay out!*

What are cyanobacteria?
• Cyanobacteria, sometimes called blue-green algae, are microscopic organisms that live in all types of water.

What is a cyanobacteria blooms?
• Cyanobacteria grow quickly, or bloom, when the water is warm, slow-moving, and full of nutrients.

What are some characteristics of cyanobacteria blooms?
• Cyanobacteria usually bloom during the summer and fall. However, they can bloom anytime during the year.
• When a bloom occurs, scum might form on the water’s surface.
• Blooms can be many different colors, from green or blue to red or brown.
• As the bloom dies off, you might smell an odor that is similar to rotting plants.

What is a toxic bloom?
• Sometimes, cyanobacteria produce toxins.
• The toxins can be present in the cyanobacteria cells or in the water.

Other important things to know:
• Swallowing water that has cyanobacteria or cyanobacterial toxins in it can cause serious illness.
• Dogs might have more severe symptoms than people, including collapse and sudden death after swallowing the contaminated water while swimming or after licking cyanobacteria from their fur.
• There are no known antidotes to these toxins. Medical care is supportive.

You cannot tell if a bloom is toxic by looking at it.

To report a cyanobacteria bloom or related health event:
• Call your local or state health department

For more information:
• [https://www.cdc.gov/habs/general.html](https://www.cdc.gov/habs/general.html)
What we know about exposure to cyanobacteria and cyanotoxins and possible health effects

Information about human health effects from exposure to cyanobacteria and toxins is primarily derived from a few epidemiology studies of recreational exposures; studies with laboratory animals; reports of extreme human exposure events, such as the use of toxin-contaminated dialysis water; and from animal (e.g., cattle and pet dog) exposures. References are available at: https://www.cdc.gov/habs/publications.html

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| Swallowing water contaminated with cyanobacteria or toxins | Data from laboratory animal studies, extreme human exposure events, and animal exposures                                | Hepatotoxins and nephrotoxins  
  • Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea  
  • Bad taste in mouth  
  • Acute hepatitis, jaundice  
  • Blood in urine or dark urine  
  • Malaise, lethargic  
  • Headache, fever  
  • Loss of appetite  
  Neurotoxins  
  • Progression of muscle twitches  
  • For saxitoxin: high doses may lead to progressive muscle paralysis |                                                                                                               |
| Skin contact with water that is contaminated with cyanobacteria or toxins | Data from human studies                                                                                            | • Allergic dermatitis (including rash, itching and blisters)  
  • Conjunctivitis                                                                                             |                                                                                                               |
| Inhaling aerosols contaminated with cyanobacteria or toxins | Anecdotal evidence from human exposures and data from human studies                                               | • Upper respiratory irritation (wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath)                      |