

## **OHHBS Newsletter article**

**Title:** CDC Releases System for Reporting Harmful Algal Blooms and Related Illnesses

**Audience:** public health partners

### **Goals:**

- Raise awareness about harmful algal blooms (HABs)
- Articulate the need for HAB case surveillance
- Highlight the One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System (OHHABS) as a solution
- Establish OHHABS in the One Health framework
- Provide information on how to access OHHABS

**Suggested graphic:** OHHABS logo

**Word count:** 524

### **CDC Develops New System for Reporting Harmful Algal Blooms and Associated Illnesses**

With the arrival of warm weather, one thing is sure to follow: algal blooms. The overgrowth of algae and plant-like bacteria in rivers, streams, and lakes can cause a range of problems, from simply being an annoying eyesore to becoming harmful algal blooms (HABs) that can cause illness in humans and animals and damage local environments. HABs can cause negative health and economic effects: In 2014, a large HAB in Lake Erie released toxins that were detected in Toledo, Ohio's water supply. Because of these toxins, the entire population of Toledo, Ohio – almost 500,000 people -- could not use public water to drink, bathe, or cook for three days.

While the incident in Toledo was a rare event, illnesses associated with HAB toxins are not uncommon. In the past decade, hundreds of people and animals have experienced skin, breathing, stomach, or intestinal symptoms from exposures to HAB toxins through recreational water activities, such as swimming in a lake with a HAB, or foodborne exposures, such as eating shellfish contaminated with HAB toxins. Animal deaths from HAB toxins have also been reported. HABs impact humans, animals, and the environment, demonstrating the need for a One Health approach where human, animal, and environmental health partners work together to better understand this emerging issue.

There is strong evidence that HABs are increasing in frequency and severity due to climate change, farming practices, and storm and wastewater runoff. Many state and federal agencies are engaged in work to improve HAB prevention, prediction, monitoring, and remediation, but there is still a need for HAB surveillance to document the occurrences of HABs and HAB-associated cases of illness. In the past, outbreak data about

HAB-associated illnesses could be reported to CDC, but these data did not provide the detailed information needed to inform case definitions for diagnosing or identifying and reporting cases of illness.

To meet the need for surveillance, CDC and partners created the One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System (OHHABS), a web-based reporting platform. Through OHHABS, state and territorial public health partners can voluntarily report HAB-associated exposures for human and animal cases of illnesses, as well as environmental data about HABs. OHHABS is supported through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, a congressionally-funded program to protect and restore the Great Lakes region. The data collected in OHHABS can help determine the frequency and severity of HABs and HAB-associated human and animal cases of illnesses and improve case definitions of HAB-associated illnesses, with the ultimate goals of better understanding and preventing HABs and their related illnesses.

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] National Outbreak Reporting System (NORS) Reporting Site Administrator. For assistance with identifying your NORS Reporting Site Administrator, please contact [NORSAdmin@cdc.gov](mailto:NORSAdmin@cdc.gov).

For more information about HABs and HAB-associated illness, visit the [CDC's new Harmful Algal Bloom-Associated Illness website](#). CDC has developed a communications toolkit with resources to help public health professionals raise awareness about HABs, HAB-associated illnesses, and OHHABS. The communications toolkit is available at [CDC's OHHABS website](#).

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