

Harmful algae in Colorado

What are harmful algae?

Harmful algae blooms (also known as blue-green algae) are common and natural to our waters and found throughout Colorado. The algae can multiply rapidly to form blooms and scums, particularly during spring through early fall.

What are the health effects?

General health effects caused by exposure to harmful algae varies according to the type of toxin and exposure. Humans can present a range of symptoms including:

- skin irritation
- vomiting, nausea
- fever
- headache
- blisters of the mouth
- stomach cramps
- diarrhea
- sore throat
- muscle and joint pain
- liver damage

Swimmers in water containing harmful algae may suffer allergic reactions such as:

- blisters around the mouth and nose
- asthma
- rashes

How can I identify harmful algae?

Harmful algae can:

- resemble thick pea soup
- look like spilled paint on the water's surface
- create a thick mat of foam along the shoreline
- be generally green or blue-green in color, although it can be brown, purple or white
- be made up of small specks or blobs floating at or just below the water surface

Harmful algae are **NOT**:

- stringy, made up of long bright grass-green strands that feel either slimy or cottony
- mustard yellow in color (this is probably pollen)

Staying safe around harmful algae:



People and pets risk illness by entering contaminated water. Do not enter the water if there are toxic blooms present.



Keep pets and livestock away from all affected waters and do not allow them to drink or wade/swim in contaminated water.



Drinking contaminated or untreated water is dangerous and can cause illness.



Avoid boating near or through toxic blooms. Clean fish well and discard guts appropriately.

What should I do if I think I'm sick from harmful algae?

- If you believe that you or someone has become ill because of harmful algae, seek medical attention. For questions about harmful algae health effects, contact the poison control center.

What if my pet is sick?

- If you believe that a pet or livestock has become ill because of harmful algae, contact your veterinarian.



For more information on toxic algae visit: www.colorado.gov/coeph



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