**SARGASSUM**

*Sargassum* is a type of brown seaweed that is washing up on beaches in Florida. As it rots, it gives off a substance called hydrogen sulfide. Hydrogen sulfide has a very unpleasant odor, like rotten eggs. Although the seaweed itself cannot harm your health, tiny sea creatures that live in *Sargassum* can cause skin rashes and blisters.

Learn more about *Sargassum*—what it is, how it can harm your health, and how to protect yourself and your family from possible health effects.

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**What is Sargassum**

*Sargassum* is a brown seaweed that floats in the ocean and is washing up on Florida beaches in large amounts.

It provides an important habitat for migratory organisms that have adapted specifically to this floating algae including crab, shrimp, sea turtles, and commercially important fish species such as tuna and marlin.

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**Why is Sargassum a concern?**

- The tiny sea creatures that live in *Sargassum* can irritate skin with direct contact.

- Decomposing *Sargassum* causes an unpleasant smell.

- People who live and work near the beach are concerned that *Sargassum* washing up along the beaches may harm their health.

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**Why does Sargassum smell so bad?**

When washed ashore, *Sargassum* will decompose (rot). Rotting *Sargassum* causes the production of hydrogen sulfide gas which smells like rotten eggs.

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**How can hydrogen sulfide affect my health?**

Hydrogen sulfide can irritate the eyes, nose, and throat. If you have asthma or other breathing illnesses, you will be more sensitive to hydrogen sulfide. You may have trouble breathing after you inhale it.

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**Does Sargassum cause skin rashes and blisters?**

*Sargassum* does not sting or cause rashes. However, tiny organisms that live in *Sargassum* (like larvae of jellyfish) may irritate skin if they come in contact with it.

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**Will hydrogen sulfide from rotting Sargassum cause cancer or other long-term health effects?**

Hydrogen sulfide is not known to cause cancer in humans. If you are exposed to hydrogen sulfide for a long time in an enclosed space with little air flow (like some work exposures), it can affect your health. However, hydrogen sulfide levels in an area like the beach, where large amounts of air flow can dilute levels, is not expected to harm health.

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**Can I use Sargassum in cooking?**

You should not use *Sargassum* in cooking because it may contain large amounts of heavy metals like arsenic and cadmium.

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**How can I protect myself and my family from exposure to Sargassum?**

- Always supervise children at the beach.
- Avoid touching or swimming near seaweed to avoid stinging by organisms that live in it.
- Use gloves if you must handle seaweed.
- Stay away from the beach if you experience irritation or breathing problems from hydrogen sulfide—at least until symptoms go away.
- Close windows and doors if you live near the beach.
- Avoid or limit your time on the beach if you have asthma or other respiratory problems.
Learn more about Sargassum

- **Sargassum** provides an important habitat for migratory organisms including crabs, shrimp, sea turtles, and commercially caught fish, such as tuna and marlin.
- **Sargassum** is common in the Sargasso Sea. The Sargasso Sea is a region of the North Atlantic Ocean. It is surrounded by four currents, but no land.
- Currently, Florida has no regulatory guidelines for exposure to hydrogen sulfide at the beach.
- Odors from most substances in outdoor air are not at levels that can harm your health. In enclosed spaces, gases may accumulate and can cause harm.
- If workers are collecting and transporting Sargassum, they should wear protective clothing, such as gloves, boots, and gas filter half masks.

For more information about beach safety, see Keep it safe and healthy at the beach, lake, river, or spring.

For more information about hydrogen sulfide, see Hydrogen Sulfide: Frequently Asked Questions.

References:


