

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **DOH-Okeechobee Cautions About Blue-Green Algae in Lake Okeechobee**



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**Okeechobee, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Okeechobee County (DOH-Okeechobee) is cautioning the public of the presence of blue-green algae in Lake Okeechobee. Blue-green algae have the potential to produce toxins. Water sample testing is routinely done at multiple locations across the lake.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and partners [collect algae samples](#) from reported bloom locations. After samples are analyzed at their laboratory, the toxin results can be viewed at [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov](#) or on DEP's Algal Bloom Dashboard at [FloridaDEP.gov](#).

Since environmental conditions can change at any time, it is important to exercise caution, even if presence of toxins has not yet been confirmed. Residents and visitors are advised to avoid contact with the water if they see algal blooms and to review Protecting Florida Together and the Algal Bloom Dashboard for the latest sample results.

DOH-Okeechobee advises residents and visitors to take the following precautions:

- Do not drink, swim, wade, use personal watercrafts, or come into contact with waters where there is a visible bloom.
- Wash your skin and clothing with soap and water if you have any contact with algae, or discolored or water that smells unpleasant.
- Keep pets and livestock away from the area to avoid any contact with water. Waters where algal blooms are present are not safe for animals. Pets and livestock should use an alternative source of water when algal blooms are present.
- Do not cook or clean dishes with water contaminated by algal blooms. Boiling the water will not eliminate toxins.
- Eating fillets from healthy fish caught in freshwater lakes experiencing blooms is safe. Rinse fish fillets with tap or bottled water, throw out the guts, and cook fish thoroughly.
- Do not eat shellfish in waters with algal blooms.

### **What is Blue-Green Algae?**

Blue-green algae are a type of bacteria that is common in Florida's freshwater environments. A bloom occurs when rapid growth of algae leads to an accumulation of individual cells that discolor water and often produce floating mats that emit unpleasant odors.

Blue-green algae blooms can also appear as scum, foam, or paint on the surface of the water in various colors. To learn more about the appearance of algal blooms, please visit [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov](https://www.protectingfloridatogether.gov).

Some environmental factors that contribute to blue-green algae blooms are sunny days, warm water temperatures, still water conditions, and excess nutrients. Blooms can appear year-round but are more frequent in summer and fall. Many types of blue-green algae can produce toxins. Blue-green algae may not always be visible as a bloom, but it can still be present in the water.

### Is Blue-Green Algae Harmful?

Blue-green algae can produce toxins, which can be harmful to human and pets as well as ecosystems, including fish and other aquatic animals. Sensitive individuals (e.g., children, the elderly, and those who are immunocompromised) may still be at risk even at low concentrations and should avoid any exposure.

For more information on potential health effects of algal blooms, please visit [FloridaHealth.gov](https://www.floridahealth.gov).

### Where Can I Find Current Water Status Information?

Current information about Florida's water quality status and public health notifications for harmful algal blooms and beach conditions are available at [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov](https://www.protectingfloridatogether.gov). Additionally, individuals can [subscribe to receive notifications](#) when water quality changes in their local areas.

### Where Can I Report Issues Related to Algae Blooms?

- **Algal Blooms:** DEP monitors algal blooms and collects samples for analysis. Blooms can be reported to DEP via the [Algal Bloom Monitoring and Response Form](#) or by calling toll-free at 1-855-305-3903.
- **Human Health Impacts:** Report symptoms from exposure to a harmful algal bloom, or any aquatic toxin, to the Florida Poison Information Center by calling 1-800-222-1222 to speak with a poison specialist.
- **Animal Health Impacts:** Contact your veterinarian if you believe your pet has become ill after consuming or having contact with blue-green algae contaminated water.
- **Fish Kills:** Dead, diseased, or abnormally behaving fish or wildlife should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish Kill Hotline online at [myFWC.com](https://myFWC.com) or by calling 1-800-636-0511.

If you have other health questions or concerns about blue-green algae, please call DOH-Okeechobee at 772-873-4927.

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