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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: THE FACTS ON BLUE GREEN ALGAE



Contact:

Communications Office

NewsMedia@flhealth.gov

850-245-4111

Tallahassee, Fla.— The Florida Department of Health works every day to educate Floridians on the potential health effects of blue-green algae. Our public health professionals are in the community working to protect Floridians and inform them of possible health hazards caused by blue green algae.

The department has posted hundreds of signs, sent out multiple press releases and have staff in communities every day educating Floridians. We are also in constant contact with county and city leaders helping to address the needs of communities.

Cyanobacteria, commonly called blue-green algae, are a group of organisms that can live in freshwater, salt water or mixed "brackish" water. These kinds of organisms are naturally occurring in Florida's environment and are also found all over the world. Sometimes, blue-green algae can produce toxins, known as microcystin. Not all blue-green algae produces toxins.

Algae blooms are easy to see as many types float on top of the water and are colorful including green, brown, and red. When blooms are present, the Florida Department of Health recommends that people avoid these areas.

State Toxicologist Dr. Kendra Goff said, "It is important that adults, children and pets avoid swimming in or drinking water containing blue-green algae. It is best not to come in to contact with water in areas where you see foam, scum, or mats of algae on the water."

Bureau of Environmental Health Scientific Advisor Andrew Reich said, "At high levels of exposure, such as when pets drink untreated surface water with thick cyanobacteria blooms, cyanotoxins can cause significant health impacts. However, cyanotoxins do not aerosolize to significant amounts and exposure via inhalation is not a risk to the general public's health."

The Florida Department of Health is in frequent communication with the CDC on issues related to harmful algal blooms (HABs) including red tide and blue-green algae, as Florida is a national leader in HAB response. There is limited research into the long-term health impacts from exposures to blue-green algae. The department supports further research and has a long-term partnership with CDC on harmful algal blooms, which has included research. The department will continue its partnership with CDC to facilitate collaboration and ensure the most effective, efficient and timely response is carried out.

County Health Department efforts to date include:

- DOH-Lee has sent a press release detailing the affected areas and precautions to take. Early July, they posted signage in all impacted areas of the county. They are currently in coordination with Lee County Commissioners; Human Services Director; all mayors of

Lee County, Lee Health healthcare system and Lee County Emergency Management to provide technical assistance and educational materials.

- DOH-Charlotte coordinated a partner meeting with county government, as well as other community partners.
- DOH-Clay has sent a press release detailing the affected area and health precautions. They have contacted county government about signage at boat ramps and other affected areas. An environmental health specialist spent an afternoon with employees at the Boy Scout Camp near Doctors Lake to discuss importance of not swimming near/in where there are active blooms. Camp confirmed that they do monitor their docks and will cancel all water recreational activities, should there be any like concern.
- DOH-Glades issued a press release with blue green algae and water safety messaging earlier this month, as well as provided resources to local partners. They have not had any reports of blue-green algae in their area, but continue to monitor and stand ready to distribute public health resources, when needed.
- DOH-Martin has sent a press release and provided public outreach detailing the affected areas and precautions to take. They are in regular contact with Martin County Government and the City of Stuart and provided guidance regarding advisory signage posted in various locations around the county. They continue to provide resources and information to partners, as needed, in order to educate residents and visitors of precautions that can be taken when in the area of blue green algae.
- All other counties are currently monitoring, and are distributing public health information when needed.

For more information, visit DOH's webpage on aquatic toxins:
<http://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/aquatic-toxins/>

Additional resources:

- DOH has also created a [toolkit](#) for Swim it, Shore it, Dodge it, included are resources for both Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) and red tide.
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:
<https://www.cdc.gov/habs/index.html>
- For questions on health concerns, call 1-800-222-1222
- For the latest Red Tide Status Reports: www.MyFWC.com/RedTide
- Current Beach Conditions: www.mote.org/beaches
- To report Fish Kills: 800-636-0511 (FWC)

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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