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## **\$650,000 AWARDED IN HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOM RESEARCH FUNDING**



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**Tallahassee, Fla.**— The Florida Department of Health announced that \$650,000 in legislatively-appropriated funds was awarded to four Florida universities. This funding will support these researchers in their efforts to improve the understanding of the potential long-term human-health impacts of harmful algal blooms like blue-green algae and red tide.

The following organizations received awards:

- Florida Atlantic University
- University of Florida
- University of Miami
- Florida Gulf Coast University

Governor Ron DeSantis said, "Our water and natural resources are what make Florida such a desirable and unique place to live and visit. When they are threatened, our economy and way of life are threatened, too. These important grants will help advance the crucial research needed to ensure Floridians and visitors can safely enjoy our beautiful waterways."

Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez said, "Environmental policy is a priority for our administration. Ensuring our waterways are safe and free of harmful blooms is critical to safeguarding one of our state's biggest commodities - our natural resources. The health of Floridians is paramount, and this investment will be fundamental in researching the health-related impacts of the algae bloom."

State Surgeon General and Secretary Dr. Scott Rivkees said, "The presence of harmful algal blooms in Florida's bodies of water severely impacts our public health and economy," said State Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees. "This research will support our efforts toward a better understanding of the health risks of exposure to harmful algae blooms and how best to treat the consequences."

"We are filling an important gap in knowledge about the potential long-term health impacts of harmful algal blooms on human health," said Adam Schaefer, MPH, epidemiologist at Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute. "I look forward to working with all of our research partners on this important public health research initiative."

"We are excited about this new research project funded by the Florida Department of Health," said Dr. Yi Guo, assistant professor at University of Florida's College of Medicine Department of

Health Outcomes and Policy. "It is critically important to identify the geographic locations with elevated rates of human diseases associated with harmful algal blooms and quantify the toxins in these blooms. Housing the largest health data repository in Florida with over 15 million patients, the University of Florida is the perfect institute to lead this project."

"Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) research funded by the Florida Department of Health will begin to address the question of airborne cyanotoxin exposure for people living near or recreating on waterbodies experiencing a cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) bloom," said Dr. Barry Rosen, a professor in the Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University. "In conjunction with an upcoming Centers for Disease Control project, FGCU will help identify volunteers that reside near effected waterbodies in the Lake Okeechobee watershed for their study. A subset of samples will also be analyzed for the amino acid BMAA, a potential new health risk that is poorly understood."

"It is an honor for us to be selected for this research award that will bring together the environmental sciences, population-level sciences and clinical resources of our marine and medical schools to support the study of harmful algal bloom impacts among Floridians and visitors," said Dr. Kim Pendorf, assistant professor of Oceans Sciences at Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science and Dr. Alberto Caban-Martinez, [Assistant Professor of Public Health Sciences](#) at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

Potential outcomes of the research will include improved environmental and/or human toxin tests and a better understanding of the health risks for people with variable exposure to the toxins (from the occasional beach visitor to those with occupational exposures). The priorities for this research are:

- Prevention: Research with a focus on prevention of impacts from exposure to toxins associated with harmful algal blooms.
- Treatment: Research with a focus on improved treatment of impacts from exposure to toxins associated with harmful algal blooms.
- Health Disparities: Research that contributes to reductions of impacts from exposure to toxins associated with harmful algal blooms resulting from health disparities due to race, ethnicity or income.
- Screening: Improve screening accuracy, detection of high-risk subgroups, and/or improved implementation of a HAB-toxin screening program that results in an increase in early detection or prevention of HAB related illness.

This research will support the Governor's Executive Order 19-12, which aims to encourage partnerships to address critical water quality issues and their impact on the citizens and visitors to Florida.

### **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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