

Now that the weather in Ohio is finally warming up, many Ohioans are thinking about summer boating, swimming or fishing trips at our local lakes and rivers. This is also the time when individuals need to be cautious of harmful algal blooms (HABs). HABs are tracked and reported at the Ohio EPA's website: <http://epa.ohio.gov/habalgae.aspx>. If you are planning a boating or swimming event this summer, check out the Ohio EPA's website for any reports of HABs where you will be traveling. If you notice a blue-green algae bloom, you can also report it at this website.

Most of the algae individuals see are green algae, which are not harmful. HABs are caused by certain types of blue-green algae. The dangerous species are actually organisms called cyanobacteria rather than algae. Typically, these cyanobacteria dramatically increase in number or "bloom" during the warmer months. Some blooms appear as foam, scum, or mats on the surface of fresh water lakes or ponds. The blooms occur in several different colors including, red, green, blue or brown. Some species of the blue-green algae produce an odor that humans are extremely sensitive to. These odors are unpleasant but are not toxic.

The concern with HABs is that the "algae" or cyanobacteria produce toxins that are dangerous to both humans and pets. According to the Ohio Department of Health, the types of health problems that exposed individuals can experience depend on how the individual was exposed. Skin contact with the toxins can result in rashes, hives, or blisters. Breathing in the water droplets or mist of contaminated lake/river water can cause watery eyes and runny nose, sore throat, asthma-like symptoms, or allergic reactions. Swallowing contaminated water can cause severe diarrhea and vomiting, liver damage, kidney damage and neurotoxicity (weakness, salivation, tingly fingers, numbness, dizziness, difficulties breathing and death).

You can protect yourself and your pets by not swimming or boating where blooms are occurring. Also, don't water lawns or gardens with water from bodies of water with HABs. Watching out for posted water body advisories on the Ohio EPA website above will also help to keep you and your family safe. If you do come into contact with HAB contaminated water, it is important to rinse off with clean, fresh water as soon as possible. Be sure to seek medical attention if you think you, a family member or pet has been poisoned by toxic HAB or if symptoms occur.