



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
June 17, 2016

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State Departments of Health and Agriculture Urge Residents to Avoid Blue-green Algae

BISMARCK, N.D. – Hot summer weather can contribute to the production of blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) in bodies of water that are used by people, pets and livestock. Exposure from ingested water contaminated by blue-green algae can cause illness and can result in death. There are no known antidotes for the toxins produced by blue-green algae. Recent reports of a blue-green algae bloom in Homme Dam near Park River have prompted local officials to issue exposure warnings for the water at that recreational site.

The North Dakota Departments of Health (NDDoH) and Agriculture (NDDA), Animal Health Division, urge the public to avoid contact with or swallowing water affected by blue-green algae, and to protect their pets and livestock from waters that are affected.

Blue-green algae discolor water, and can cause foam, scum, or mats to appear on the surface. The NDDoH can test water for toxins, and if they are detected, can issue warnings to the public. However, because it can take time to test water, people are urged to err on the side of caution and avoid waters that look discolored or scummy, or that have a foul odor.

According to Dr. Susan Keller, state veterinarian, these algae blooms are most common in North Dakota in late summer. However, it only takes a few hot days, like the ones we have been experiencing recently, to cause the algae to bloom. “Blue-green algae normally can be found in many lakes and pasture watering holes,” Keller said. “Reports of blue-green algae in Walsh County remind us to be on the alert for algae blooms throughout the state.”

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People and animals that swallow water containing cyanotoxins can become sick with severe diarrhea and vomiting; numb lips, tingling fingers and toes; dizziness; or rashes, hives or skin blisters. Children are at higher risk than adults for illness because their smaller size can allow them to ingest a relatively larger dose of toxin.

The Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Division, recommends these steps to avoid exposure to cyanotoxins:

- Respect advisories announced by public health authorities.
- Do not swim, water ski, or boat in areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum or mats of green or blue-green algae on the water.
- If you accidentally swim in water that might have a cyanobacteria bloom, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Do not let pets or livestock swim in or drink from areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum, or mats of algae.
- If pets (especially dogs) swim in scummy water, rinse them off immediately – do not let them lick the algae (and toxins) off.
- Do not irrigate lawns or golf courses with pond water that looks scummy or smells bad.

For more information about the effects of blue-green algae blooms on pets and livestock, contact the Animal Health Division, North Dakota Department of Agriculture at 701.328.2655. For more information on public health issues, contact Mike Ell, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.5210.

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