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Blue-green Algae Identified in Harvey Reservoir; Health Officials Advise Public to Avoid Exposure to Algae Blooms

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) and Agriculture (NDDA), Animal Health Division, have issued a blue-green algae advisory for Harvey Reservoir (located in Wells County) due to the presence of blue-green algae bloom on the lake and the risk of microcystin in the water. Microcystin is a cyanotoxin caused by blue-green algae. When present in water, cyanotoxins are dangerous for both people and animals.

The public and local officials observed a blue-green algae bloom in Harvey Reservoir last week and notified the NDDoH. In response, NDDoH staff investigated the bloom on Thursday and confirmed the presence of blue-green algae in the lake, along the swimming beach, and boat ramp areas. While testing at the lake showed microcystin present, the concentration was well below the state's health threshold of 10 µg/L (part per billion). On Friday, signs were posted around the lake by the Harvey Park District advising the public that blue-green algae are present in the lake and that the water can be harmful to humans and pets. "As long as the bloom persists in Harvey Reservoir, the Department will continue to monitor the lake and collect samples for analysis," says Mike Ell with the NDDoH Division of Water Quality.

The production of blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, often happens during hot weather in bodies of water that are used by people, pets, and livestock. Exposure from ingesting affected water can cause illness in people and animals, and can result in death. There are no known antidotes for the toxins.

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Blue-green algae discolor the water they live in, and can cause foam, scum, or mats to appear on the surface. 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 get a relatively larger dose of toxin.

Please take the following steps to avoid exposure to cyanotoxins:

- Respect any advisories announced by public health authorities. If you see posted signs or hear messages to stay out of a certain body of water, respect the warning.
- 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 on the water.
- If pets (especially dogs) swim in scummy water, rinse them off immediately –do not let them lick the algae (and toxins) off their fur.
- Do not irrigate lawns or golf courses with pond water that looks scummy or smells bad.

For more information on public health issues, contact Mike Ell, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.220.5025. For specific questions concerning Harvey Reservoir, contact Brittany Long with the Wells County District Health Unit at 701.547.3756.

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