

Toxic Algae Caution Advisory

Northeast Shore Lake Tapps, July 19, 2018



A bloom of potentially-toxic algae is in the northeast area of Lake Tapps, along the east shore of Tapps Island. Health Department staff have sent a sample of the algae to a laboratory and the results should be available in the next week or so. In the meantime, we recommend you and your pets avoid areas with algae. **If you don't see algae, it should be safe to swim and waterski.** Keep in mind as wind direction changes, the algae could move elsewhere in the lake.

We recommend you:

- **Keep children and pets away from areas with algae.**
- **Don't swim, wade, waterski, or fish in areas with algae.**

What is toxic algae?

Toxic algae, also known as cyanobacteria or blue-green algae, can produce toxins. These toxins may kill pets, waterfowl, and other animals. They can also cause serious illness or even death in people. Toxic algae are naturally occurring but likely have increased in number because of impacts from human activities.

What is a toxic algae bloom?

Toxic algae can reproduce rapidly in fresh water when the amount of sunlight, temperature, and nutrients are sufficient. Within a few days a "clear" lake, pond, or ditch can become discolored with algae growth. A bloom forms when a sudden increase in the concentration of algae cells happens in a certain area of water. Toxic algae blooms often float to the surface and can form a surface scum. This scum, or heavy concentration of algae, can look like green paint and be several inches thick near the shoreline. Wind and weather conditions can greatly change the amount and location of algae.

What are the symptoms?

If someone swallows water with toxic algae, they may experience:

- Muscle weakness.
- Vomiting.
- Diarrhea.
- Nausea.

If you know or believe someone may have swallowed water containing large amounts of algae, it is extremely important to seek medical attention.

Skin contact with toxic algae can cause irritation or a rash. This is a different rash than that caused by [Swimmer's Itch](#).

How can toxic algae affect my pets?

The risk to pets is much greater than it is to people. Pets have smaller body sizes, are more likely to drink water containing a large amount of algae, and may groom by licking their fur after contact with water containing toxic algae. Pets and other animals may show these symptoms if they ingest toxic algae:

- Lethargy
- Vomiting.
- Diarrhea.

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- Convulsions.
- Difficulty breathing.
- General weakness.

What should I do if exposed to toxic algae?

The onset of illness can happen within minutes to hours of exposure. You should rinse off anyone or any pets exposed to toxic algae immediately. Monitor for signs of illness and seek medical treatment if symptoms occur. For exposed pets, keep them from licking their fur to groom.

Can I eat fish from toxic algae contaminated water?

Avoid eating fish from areas with visible algae. Always clean fish well and discard guts.

What should I do if I see an algae bloom?

Follow these steps to keep yourself, your family, and your pets safe:

- Don't drink lake water.
- Don't swim or waterski in areas with visible algae.
- Keep pets and livestock away.
- Tell us. If the area is open to the public and isn't already posted with a Health Department sign, call us at (253) 798-6470.

What causes toxic algae?

Runoff from fertilizers, animal and human waste reach our lakes and contribute to algae growth. Reducing the use of fertilizers, properly maintaining septic systems, and properly disposing of pet waste helps improve water quality in lakes, streams, groundwater, and Puget Sound.

Questions? Contact Ray Hanowell at (253) 798-2845 or rhanowell@tpchd.org, Tina Friedrich at (253) 798-4715 or tfriedrich@tpchd.org, or visit www.tpchd.org/toxicalgae to learn more.