

Although Toxic Blue-Green Algae Blooms are less harmful to humans than to small animals, there is always danger and risk. We should not only protect ourselves but our pets and livestock as well.

Contact With Blue-Green Algae Can Be Poisonous

Get proper medical or veterinary attention immediately if you or your pets or livestock have signs of poisoning. Blue-green algae can produce nerve toxins and liver toxins. Signs of neurotoxin poisoning usually appear within 15-20 minutes after ingestion. In animals, signs include weakness, staggering, difficulty in breathing, convulsions and death. In people, signs may include numbness of the lips, tingling in fingers and toes, and dizziness. It may be hours or days before signs of liver poisoning appear. Liver toxins can cause abdominal pain, diarrhea and vomiting in humans and death in animals. Poisoning is more severe the smaller the person or animal and the larger the amount of toxin ingested.

What If I See a Bloom?

As soon as you notice a bloom or possible signs of poisoning:

- Avoid all contact with water containing the algae.
- Keep pets and livestock away from the water.
- Call the health department at 253-798-6470 to report the bloom.

Health Risk Prevention

Most people in Pierce County will never come in contact with Toxic Blue-Green Algae; however, there are those who are at risk. If you:

- Enjoy lake activities such as swimming, fishing, boating
- Graze your livestock near a lake or pond
- Are a veterinarian

What Can I Do About It?

Algae blooms are likely to occur during sunny, calm weather when high concentrations of nutrients are present in the water. People can have a big effect on the amount of nutrients in a lake. Two important nutrients algae require are phosphorous and nitrogen. These are found in animal and human waste (sewage) and in fertilizers. Excessive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus may lead to "nutrient loading" and eventually to an algae bloom. To help decrease nutrient loading:

1. Maintain or restore native plants around lake shorelines and streams that feed the lake. Native wetland plants help filter water and don't require pesticides or fertilizers for maintenance.
2. Be extremely cautious with lawn and plant fertilizers and pesticides. Don't over-water, over-fertilize, or use more than the recommended amount of pesticides.
3. Improperly operating or damaged septic systems are a major cause of nutrient loading into nearby water. Proper care and maintenance of your septic system are essential. For information on how to maintain your septic system please call the health department at 253-798-6470.
4. Prevent surface water runoff from agricultural and livestock areas. Do not allow livestock to drink or defecate in streams or lakes. Don't feed waterfowl.
5. Take steps to prevent erosion around construction and logging operations. Erosion can carry nutrient-rich soil into nearby lake

Contact Information

If you need information or want to report a blue-green algae bloom in Pierce County call the health department at 253-798-6470 or the Washington State Department of Ecology Water Quality Program 360 407-6270.