

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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What is blue-green algae and why does it matter?

Are you living near a lake with blue-green algae issues? It is common in Alberta, especially in the summer.

Blue-green algae occurs naturally, and often becomes visible when weather conditions are calm. It may look like scum, grass clippings, fuzz or globs on the surface of water. It can be blue-green, greenish-brown, brown, and/or pinkish-red, and it often smells musty or grassy.

People who come in contact with visible blue-green algae or who drink water containing blue-green algae may experience skin irritation, rash, sore throat, sore red eyes, swollen lips, fever, nausea and vomiting and/or diarrhea. Symptoms usually appear within one to three hours and resolve in one to two days. Symptoms in children are often more pronounced. However, all people are at risk of these symptoms.

If blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) bloom has been identified on your lake, you are advised to take the following precautions:

- Avoid all contact with blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) blooms. If contact occurs, wash with tap water as soon as possible.
- Do not swim or wade (or allow your pets to swim or wade) in any areas where blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) is visible.
- Do not feed whole fish or fish trimmings from this lake to your pets.
- Consider limiting human consumption of whole fish and fish trimmings from this lake, as it is known that fish may store toxins in their liver. (People can safely consume fish fillets from this lake).

As always, visitors and residents are reminded to never drink or cook with untreated water directly from any recreational body of water at any time. Boiling this water will not remove the



toxins produced by blue-green algae. An alternate source of drinking water should also be provided for pets and livestock, while a blue-green algae advisory is active.

Weather and wind conditions can cause algae blooms to move from one location in the lake to another. Areas of the lake in which the blue-green algae bloom is not visible can still be used for recreational purposes, even while a blue-green algae Health Advisory is in place.

If you suspect a problem related to blue-green algae or if you require further information on health concerns and blue-green algae, please call Health Link at 811. Additional information, including current health advisories, can be found online at www.ahs.ca/bga.