State of New Jersey
Department of Environmental Protection

Harmful Algal Blooms and Pets

June 2020

Cyanobacterial toxins can poison people and pets.

Pets can be affected by HAB toxins by drinking affected water, licking their fur or eating algae. If untreated, cyanobacterial poisonings are usually fatal in dogs. Even in cases where a poisoned dog receives prompt veterinary care, it may not fully recover:

Don't let your pet have contact with water if:

- It's slimy or has foam, scum or mats of cyanobacteria on the surface.
- The color can vary. HABs can be bright green, blue-green, brown/red or white.
- It smells. Some HABs produce a rotten smell caused by decaying cyanobacteria.
- You see a sign indicating a HAB is present (even if the water looks ok).

Report the location of the suspected HAB.

- The DEP will test the water to determine if a HAB is occurring and will post appropriate warning signs.

What should I do if my dog waded or swam in water with a suspected HAB?

Call your vet immediately if your dog has swallowed water from an area with a suspected HAB or if any of the following symptoms arise:

- Rashes or hives
- Loss of appetite, vomiting, or abdominal swelling or tenderness
- Diarrhea or tarry or bloody stool
- Staggering, convulsions, seizures or paralysis
- Foaming at the mouth, yellowing of gums or eye whites, excessive drooling
- Any other unexplained sickness after being in contact with water

Photo Credit: GettyImages

Symptoms can occur anywhere from 15 minutes to several days after exposure. In severe cases, dogs can show signs of toxicity within a few minutes and can die within an hour of toxin exposure.

Photo Credit: NJ DEP

What are Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)?

Cyanobacterial Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) are excessive growths of cyanobacteria (also called blue-green algae), some of which can produce harmful toxins. Blooms can form in warm, slow-moving waters that are rich in nutrients from sources such as fertilizer runoff or septic tank overflows. Blooms often result in a thick coating or "mat" on the surface of a waterbody, often in mid-late summer or early fall, as long as the weather remains warm.

How to identify a HAB:

HABs are typically bright green, but they can also appear as spilled paint, discolored water, parallel streaks, green dots or globs, and/or can appear foamy or as surface scum. Blooms can also sometimes occur just beneath the surface of the water. The water may smell bad as cyanobacteria in the bloom die.

It is important to note that not all blooms are caused by cyanobacteria or are harmful. Some algal blooms are due to common green algae. Additionally, pond "muck" and duckweed can be mistaken for algal blooms. Even when present, cyanobacteria do not always produce cyanotoxins. You cannot tell if a bloom has toxins by looking at it. If you are unsure, it is best to avoid contact with the water and keep your pet on a leash at all times.

Report a HAB

- A suspected HAB in a lake, pond, river, or stream can be reported by Smart Phone or PC using the DEP HAB Reporting and Communication System (https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/6335130701574e688500f7c5556fc2b3). If a smart phone or computer is not available, call the DEP Hotline at 1-877-WARNDEP (927-6337) and please note the exact location of the suspected HAB along with any details (e.g., date/time, bloom appearance and color, whether a swimming beach is nearby).For more information, please visit the DEP Harmful Algal Blooms website: www.nj.gov/dep/hab/

Common Cyanobacteria Harmful Algal Blooms / HABs

Photo Credit: NJ DEP

Not a Harmful Algal Bloom / HAB

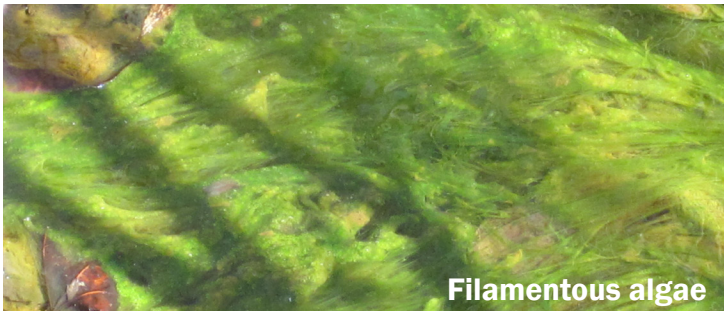

Photo Credit: NJ DEP

AVOID IT & REPORT IT!

To report what could be a HAB, scan the QR code with your *smart phones camera.* If a computer or smart phone is not available, call the NJDEP Hotline at **1-877-WARNDEP (927-6337)**. To see water bodies that are or have experienced blooms, visit **www.state.nj.us/dep/wms/bfbm/cyanoHABevents.html**