

What are blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae are tiny organisms which occur naturally in lochs, ponds, reservoirs, rivers and in the sea. Blue-green algae commonly occur during periods of prolonged hot weather but sometimes occur at other times of the year. Waters which have been polluted by agricultural, domestic or industrial discharges are prone to developing blue-green algae.

In still waters the algae can multiply to such an extent that they discolour the water which then appears green, blue-green, greenish brown or dark brown. Sometimes a scum may form on the surface. This scum can appear in different places at different times, but is most commonly found at the water's edge or shore line.

How do blue-green algae affect humans and animals?

Some, but not all the blue-green algae release toxins into the water. It is not possible to tell which algae do or do not produce toxins simply by their appearance. Laboratory analysis is needed for this. Therefore, it is advisable to regard all algal scums as toxic.

The toxins of blue-green algae can cause deaths of animals which come into contact with algae, either through

drinking contaminated water or swallowing quantities of the scum. Dogs have died after going into the water at the shores of affected lochs.

Canoeists, wind surfers and swimmers who have either swum through algal scum or swallowed it have suffered from skin rashes, eye irritation, vomiting, diarrhoea and pains in muscles and joints. There have been no reports of long-term illness or death in human beings following exposure to blue-green algae in recreational waters in the UK. However, illnesses are sometimes severe.

Drinking water supplies are monitored to prevent any harmful effects on health from blue-green algae.

What should I do about blue-green algae?

Avoid all contact with the affected waters and ensure that children and pets are kept away.

Farmers should ensure that their animals do not have access to contaminated water. This may require fencing around suspect waters.

If any member of the public finds areas of water affected with blue-green algae they should inform their local Council Environmental Health Department. Environmental Health

may then take action to ensure that notices are posted around the affected water to let local residents, visitors or patrons know what the position is. A typical warning notice which may be used is shown overleaf.

What about eating fish from affected waters?

Blue-green algae and their toxins can adversely affect fish growth and health and, in some circumstances, can cause fish kills.

It is currently thought that eating fish from waters affected by blue-green algae is acceptable, provided that there are no dead fish in the waterbody concerned, and the fish appear healthy. The fish should be thoroughly gutted and well washed before eating.

You should not feed the liver, other offal, or gut from fish caught in waters affected with blue-green algae to pets.

If you would like any further advice about blue-green algae in your area, please contact your local Council Environmental Health Department.

**WARNING NOTICE
BLUE-GREEN ALGAL BLOOMS**

HIGH CONCENTRATIONS OF BLUE-GREEN ALGAE HAVE BEEN FOUND IN THIS WATER.

SWALLOWING THE WATER OR ALGAL SCUM CAN CAUSE STOMACH UPSETS OR MORE SERIOUS HEALTH EFFECTS.

CONTACT WITH THE WATER OR WITH ALGAL SCUM CAN CAUSE SKIN PROBLEMS.

IT IS A SENSIBLE PRECAUTION FOR YOU, YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR ANIMALS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH THE SCUM AND THE WATER CLOSE TO IT.

**NOTICE POSTED ON:
<DATE>**

EFFECTIVE UNTIL : <DATE>

**NOTICE POSTED BY:
<NAME OF ORGANISATION>
<ADDRESS>**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
TELEPHONE:**

Information produced by:

Health Protection Team
Directorate of Public Health &
Health Policy
NHS Highland
Assynt House
Beechwood Park
Inverness
IV2 3BW

**Further copies of this leaflet can be
obtained from:**

Tara MacKenzie
Administrative Assistant
Tel: 01463 704886
E-mail: tara.mackenzie@nhs.net

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***Information
about
Blue-Green
Algae***