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Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

news release

Aug. 2, 2024

Residents reminded to avoid harmful algal blooms

As summer starts to wind down, officials are reminding residents to keep an eye out for and avoid contact with cyanobacteria while recreating at area rivers and lakes.

Cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, can be present in any fresh water body, and looks like dark green, blue-green, black, orange or brown scum, foam or mats on the riverbed or floating on the water. Cyanobacteria can produce harmful compounds, such as toxins and taste and odors, that cause health risks to humans and animals. Warm water and abundant nutrients can cause cyanobacteria to grow more rapidly than usual causing "blooms." These blooms are termed "harmful algal blooms."

Typically, cyanobacteria warnings come out between late July and early August, coinciding with low flows and sustained high temperatures in the inland areas which may contribute to cyanobacteria growth in local rivers and lagoons.

Supervising Environmental Health Specialist Ben Dolf with the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services Environmental Health Division (DEH), said, "Visual indicators are key to identifying areas impacted by harmful algal blooms. Citizen surveillance is key, and DEH staff will investigate any potential blooms reported by the public."

While most cyanobacteria do not affect animals or people, some are capable of producing toxins that can be harmful to animals and humans. Dogs and children are most likely to be affected because of their smaller body size and tendency to stay in the water for longer periods of time.

Officials recommend the following guidelines for recreational users of fresh water areas:

- Keep children, pets and livestock from swimming in or drinking water containing algal scums or mats.

- Adults should also avoid wading and swimming in water containing algal blooms. Try not to swallow or inhale water spray in an algal bloom area.
- If no algal scums or mats are visible, you should still carefully watch young children and warn them not to swallow any water.
- Fish should be consumed only after removing the guts and liver and rinsing fillets in tap water.
- Never drink, cook with or wash dishes with water from rivers, streams or lakes.
- Get medical attention immediately if you think that you, your pet or livestock might have been poisoned by cyanobacteria toxins. Be sure to tell the doctor or veterinarian about possible contact with cyanobacteria or algal blooms.
- Join or support one of the many watershed and river organizations.

To learn more about cyanobacteria and harmful algal blooms, visit the state of California's website at www.mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/index.html.

To report a bloom, e-mail CyanoHAB.Reports@waterboards.ca.gov or call 844-729-6466 (toll free). Blooms can also be reported via the "bloomWatch" app which is available for free download on iTunes or Google play.

For information on conditions in Humboldt County, contact the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services Division of Environmental Health at 707-445-6215 or 800-963-9241. Photos of suspected blooms can also be emailed to envhealth@co.humboldt.ca.us.

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