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news release

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Cyanobacteria confirmed in Big Lagoon

Environmental Health officials from the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) reported that toxins associated with cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) have been confirmed at Big Lagoon. Health advisory signs are being posted.

Warning signs are also being posted on other area rivers and lagoons, including the Eel and Van Duzen.

Cyanobacteria can be present in any freshwater body. It looks like dark green, blue-green, black, orange or brown scum, foam or mats on the riverbed or floating on the water. Warm water and abundant nutrients can cause cyanobacteria to grow more rapidly than usual causing "blooms." These blooms are termed "harmful algal blooms."

"While not all cyanobacteria is harmful, a small number of cyanobacteria species are capable of producing natural toxins that can affect animals and humans," said Melissa Martel, director of DHHS's Division of Environmental Health. "Dogs and children are most susceptible because of their smaller body size and tendency to stay in the water for longer periods of time."

DHHS is aware of 11 dog deaths which may have been caused by cyanobacteria poisoning since 2001. The dogs died shortly after swimming in Big Lagoon, the South Fork Eel River and the Van Duzen River.

Potential symptoms in dogs following exposure to cyanobacteria can include lethargy, difficulty breathing, salivation, vomiting, urination, diarrhea, or convulsions. People can experience eye irritation, skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea and cold or flu-like symptoms. While there is no antidote for exposures, persons should see their physician and those with pets which may have been exposed should go to their veterinarian for supportive care.

Human activities have an effect on nutrient and water flows in rivers, streams and lakes. Nutrients found in fertilizers, animal waste and human

waste can stimulate blooms. Excessive water diversions can also increase water temperatures and reduce flows. People can take the following measures to prevent algal blooms in our waters:

- Be conservative with the use of water, fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn, garden or agricultural operation.
- Avoid nutrient runoff by recycling any “spent” soil by tilling it back into gardens, or protecting it from rainfall.
- Create shade and filter out nutrients by planting or maintaining native plants around river banks.
- Inspect and pump out septic systems every three to four years.
- Prevent surface water runoff from agricultural and livestock areas.
- Prevent erosion around construction and logging operations.

Officials recommend the following guidelines for recreational users of freshwater 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 learn more about cyanobacteria and algae on the South Fork Eel River, visit www.eelriverrecovery.org/algae.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 occurring within Humboldt County, contact the 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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