

Blue-Green Algae & Oklahoma Lakes

What you need to know...

IF IT IS GREEN ON TOP



Oklahoma's more than 200 lakes and miles of rivers are a water-lovers' paradise, but they are also complicated ecosystems susceptible to environmental and weather conditions. The nation's bodies of water, including some Oklahoma lakes and rivers, have experienced an increase in the growth of bacteria known as Blue-Green Algae. Blue-Green Algae (BGA) are free-floating, microscopic organisms naturally present in reservoirs, lakes and streams. They are usually found in low numbers, but in very warm, shallow and undisturbed waters that receive a great deal of sunlight, BGA can become abundant.

WHAT ARE BLUE-GREEN ALGAE?

- Blue-Green Algae, or cyanobacteria, are an ancient group of algae. BGA may reproduce rapidly in lakes and ponds with adequate amounts of sunlight and nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen).
- Within a span of just days, a clear lake or pond can become cloudy or deep green with algae growth. This is called a bloom.
- Although a nuisance, most BGA blooms are not toxic.

HOW CAN I TELL IF BGA ARE PRESENT IN A BLOOM?

- BGA may look like:
 - Thick pea soup; Green paint;
 - Bluish, brownish or reddish green paint.
- When BGA washes up on shore, it may form a thick mat on the beach. BGA are made up of extremely small organisms that are difficult to pick up and hold. Green algae are stringier and made up of grass-green strands. Green algae are harmless.

WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT BGA?

- The toxins produced by BGA may cause a variety of reactions, most commonly upper respiratory problems, eye irritation, vomiting and diarrhea.
- Adults are not often affected by BGA since they are less likely to be exposed; however, the consumption or inhalation of BGA can be unsafe.
- Any contact with BGA can be harmful. Please use caution when boating, waterskiing, swimming, fishing, etc.
- Children are more vulnerable than adults for several reasons:
 - They tend to play in the water and are not as cautious as adults.
 - Children are more likely to drink or accidentally swallow water when swimming.
- Children usually weigh less than adults, so a smaller quantity of toxins may trigger a more severe effect.
- Pets and livestock are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of BGA.



Photo: Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality



Photo: Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality

To find out more information, please visit www.CheckMyOKLake.com.

Blue-Green Algae Checklist

IF IT IS GREEN ON TOP



- To protect yourself and your pets, do not swim, boat, ski, play in, or ingest water that looks like “pea soup,” green or blue paint, or that has a scum layer or puffy blobs floating on the surface.
- Symptoms related to blue-green algae exposure include a rash, hives or skin blisters, stomach cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, fever, muscle weakness, or difficulty breathing. If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your doctor or the **Poison Control Center at 800.222.1222** immediately.
- Take a shower after coming into contact with surface water, whether or not a blue-green algae bloom appears to be present, to wash away any potentially harmful bacteria.
- Pets are also impacted by swimming in or drinking water with blue green algae blooms. If you think your pet may have been affected, call your veterinarian right away.
- Always be cautious while in or near the water and remember these lifesaving words:

- **Life jackets float, you don't.**
- **Be sober or pull over. Remember, only beer with 3.2% alcohol is legal on Oklahoma lakes.**
- **Where BGA is concerned, IF IT IS GREEN ON TOP**



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