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Check water for algae before diving in

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- When summer heats up in Michigan, many people flock to one of the State's 11,000 inland lakes or numerous rivers to cool off. If you're planning a fun day of rest and relaxation on the water, just make sure you look for algae before you dive in.

Algae are a large group of naturally occurring plant-like organisms found in water. Dense populations of algae are called a bloom. Some blooms are harmless, but some produce toxins, which can be poisonous to humans, animals and aquatic life.

Residents should be cautious of and avoid direct contact with water that might have an algal bloom. Blooms can take on many appearances. They can be different colors, can look foamy or scummy, look like a mat on the surface of the water, look like spilled paint, have a green sheen to it, or even look clumpy.

It's difficult to tell by looking at a bloom if it is harmful or not, so when in doubt, keep yourself and animals out of the water.

Take the following actions if you find an algal bloom:

- Avoid direct contact with the water.
- Do not drink untreated surface water, whether or not blooms are present. Boiling the water will not remove the toxins.
- Obey posted signs for public health advisories and/or beach closings.
- Do not allow children or pets to play in or drink water where algae or scum is present.
- Do not boat at high speeds, water-ski, or swim in areas where algal blooms are present.
- Do not water lawns, gardens or golf courses with impacted water.
- Report unpleasant tastes or smells in your drinking water to the local water utility.
- Property owners should not use algaecides because of the risk of releasing toxins directly into the water. Treatment requires a permit from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE).
- Do not have direct contact with mussels from impacted areas.
- Limit or avoid eating fish from impacted areas. If fish are consumed, eat only the filets, remove the guts and the liver and rinse filets in clean drinking water. Always follow the State's Eat Safe Fish Guidelines (www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish) even if a waterbody appears clear of algae.

2- Algal Blooms

People and pets can experience the following symptoms after having contact with an algal bloom:

- Skin contact may cause:
 - Rashes, hives, or skin blisters
- Swallowing contaminated water can cause:
 - Severe diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal pain
 - Abnormal liver function
 - Kidney toxicity
 - Weakness, salivation, tingly fingers, numbness, dizziness, difficulties breathing and even death
- Breathing water mist from recreational activities or sprinklers can cause:
 - Runny eyes and nose
 - Sore throat
 - Asthma-like symptoms
 - Allergic reactions

If you think you or your pet has been exposed to an algal bloom, take the following precautions:

- Leave the area and seek medical treatment if symptoms occur.
- Thoroughly rinse off pets with clean, fresh water if they swam in an area with an algal bloom.
- Seek veterinary treatment as soon as possible if you think your pet might have been poisoned by toxic algae.

For questions or to report algal blooms, contact Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) at AlgaeBloom@michigan.gov (pictures are encouraged) or 800-662-9278.

For more information, visit www.michigan.gov/habs

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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