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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.

When conditions are right, these organisms can rapidly increase to form cyanobacteria blooms, or harmful algal blooms. A bloom can occur when the water temperature is warm, conditions are calm, and the water has a high level of nutrients, like phosphorus and nitrogen. Excess nutrients can come from pollution such as lawn and farm fertilizers, animal manure, storm water runoff, sewage treatment plant discharges, and malfunctioning septic tanks. Invasive zebra and quagga mussels help make water conditions right for harmful algal blooms.

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. To see examples of what an algal bloom looks like, visit <https://www.mmdhd.org/recreational-water/> and click on "Harmful Algal Bloom Picture Guide."

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.

If you think you may have found an algal bloom, you can report it to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) by emailing AlgaeBloom@michigan.gov (pictures are encouraged) or by calling 800-662-9278.

You should also take the following actions if you think you have found a harmful algal bloom:

- Obey posted signs for public health advisories and/or beach closings.
- Do not let people, pets, or livestock in the water or near the shore in affected areas.
- Do not let people, pets or livestock drink untreated surface water, especially if an algal bloom is present.

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2- Algal Blooms

- Always rinse off people and pets after contact with any lake water.
- Do not water lawns or gardens with impacted water.
- 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.
- Report unpleasant tastes or smells in your drinking water to the local water utility.

Breathing in or swallowing water containing harmful algal blooms and their toxins may cause the following symptoms in people: diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, headache, weakness, numbness, tingly fingers, dizziness, difficulty breathing, asthma-like symptoms, runny eyes and nose, allergic reactions, sore throat, headache, and allergic reactions. Skin contact can cause rashes, blisters, or hives. If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms after contact with water that may have a harmful algal bloom, call your doctor right away.

Animals, especially dogs, can become ill or die after contact with a harmful algal bloom. Signs of illness include vomiting, diarrhea, staggered walking, and convulsions. If your pet or livestock animal becomes sick after contact with water that may have a harmful algal bloom, contact your veterinarian right away.

To help prevent harmful algal blooms, Michiganders can:

- Use phosphate-free detergents
- Dispose of pet waste properly
- Apply fertilizer only when necessary and applying the recommended amount according to label instructions. A buffer should be left when applying fertilizer near a lake or stream.

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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