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Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs): Know It, Avoid It, Report It

The Cayuga County Health Department would like to remind the public that we can all take steps to prepare ourselves for the presence of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) on local water bodies and the potential health effects to humans and pets if exposed. Skaneateles, Owasco, and Cayuga Lakes all experienced HABs last summer.

There are a few things you can do before and while you are recreating on local lakes. Weather influences where Harmful Algal Blooms will occur. During extended periods of calm and sunny days, blooms can accumulate at the surface in any location. Wind and waves may cause them to form along shorelines or in protected areas. Shifts in wind direction can move a bloom from one location to another. Periods of cool, rainy weather can often lead to the disappearance of a bloom.

KNOW IT

Bodies of water that are discolored with a paint-like or filmy appearance or floating scum should always be avoided as they are potentially harmful. Images of these types of blooms as well as non-harmful blooms can be viewed at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/81962.html>



AVOID IT

Always stay away from blooms in lakes or streams. Never swim, fish, boat, wade, or eat fish caught in areas with blooms. Bloom or no bloom, never drink, prepare food, cook, or make ice with a private water supply drawn directly from a lake that is untreated or improperly treated. During a bloom, private water supplies drawn directly from the lake should not be used for showering, bathing, or washing dishes even if treatment is provided. Public water supplies that draw water from surface water are treated, disinfected, and monitored regularly. The public would be notified by the Cayuga County Health Department if public water supplies are adversely impacted by HABs.

REPORT IT

If you think that a bloom may be harmful, report it through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) website: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/83310.html> and click Report HABs.

If you feel that you or your pets are experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, irritation of the skin, eyes, or respiratory system due to exposure to a Harmful Algal Bloom, please contact your health care provider or veterinarian.

More information regarding Harmful Algal Blooms can be found at www.cayugacounty.us/health. Any questions or to report any symptoms you think may be related to exposure to Harmful Algal Blooms, contact the Cayuga County Health Department at (315) 253-1560.