

## HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

What you need to know to stay healthy



### WHAT IS A HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOM (HAB)?

Harmful algal blooms are the rapid growth of algae that can cause harm. In freshwater, HAB is commonly caused by cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae. Cyanobacteria is a natural part of a healthy water ecosystem. However, in the summer when water temperatures are elevated and water is stagnant, cyanobacteria may take over the waterbody.

### WHAT DOES A HAB LOOK LIKE?

You cannot always tell when a HAB has formed. The blooms may stay below the water's surface. Some blooms may turn the water green, blue-green, or reddish-brown. Blooms may cause the water to smell or taste bad and may form foam or scum on the water's surface. As the bloom dies, the water may smell bad, similar to rotting plants.

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF?

- Don't swim, water ski, or boat in areas where water is discolored or you see foam, scum, or mats of algae on the water's surface.
- Do not drink scummy water
- If you do swim in water that may be contaminated, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible
- Report any "musty" smell or taste in your drinking water to your local water utility
- Follow any water-body closures announced by local public health authorities



### HOW CAN A HAB AFFECT PEOPLE?

People and animals can be exposed to HABs and become ill when the toxins are contacted, inhaled or consumed. Individuals exposed may experience the following symptoms: Skin, eye, nose, and/or throat irritation, respiratory infection

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO A HAB?

- If you have questions about symptoms you are experiencing call your local or state poison control center at (800) 222-1222.
- Consult a healthcare provider for guidance on how to relieve symptoms. There is currently no test or treatment for HAB illness but it is still important to let your healthcare provider know you may have been exposed to a HAB.
- Contact your state health department if you suspect a HAB at (615) 741-7247.