



Media Release

Water Boards Ramp Up Testing For Harmful Algal Blooms *Waterways Targeted Statewide Ahead of Busy Labor Day Weekend*

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Contact: Keith Bouma-Gregson 916-322-8430
Greg Gearhart 916 341-5892

SACRAMENTO – The State Water Board and nine regional water boards have ramped up testing for harmful algal blooms at popular lakes and streams throughout the state in time for the latest data to be posted ahead of the busy Labor Day weekend, when many Californians will be seeking guidance about which waterways offer safe and healthy recreation options.

With awareness of this emerging trend at an all-time high in 2019, the heightened scrutiny comes as harmful algal blooms, or HABs, have made news statewide and throughout the nation with reports of dogs falling ill or even dying shortly after swimming in waters with suspected blooms.

In 2018, 190 reports of potential blooms were received, and state and local agencies posted approximately 145 public health alerts at waterbodies throughout California. The interagency HAB-related Illness Working Group received 44 reports of potential HAB-related human and animal illnesses in 2018. Following further evaluation of the available environmental and health related information, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) reported 19 cases to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System (OHHABS) as suspected, probable, or confirmed link to HAB exposure. These reported cases included 8 human, 4 domestic animal, and 7 fish or wildlife incidents.

Best identified by its blue-green, streaky appearance in water but sometimes not readily detected visually, HABs can be a danger to humans and animals. Cyanotoxins in the algal blooms can trigger a range of health concerns, including irritation to the respiratory system, as well as skin, nose, eye, and throat discomfort.

Dogs and children are most vulnerable, as they tend to spend more time playing in the water and are more likely to swallow it.

Last week, the Water Boards gathered testing samples at many of the state's most visited lakes and streams with a history of HABs, part of an annual collaborative effort with state and local agencies to gather data and share it with the public. This is the third consecutive year of heightened testing prior to Labor Day. The Water Boards, the



California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and California Department of Public Health, along with water managers and county and state health officials, have teamed up to investigate reported cases of health impacts linked to freshwater blooms.

The results of the targeted sampling for about 40 waterbodies are summarized in an interactive map showing which sites were tested at each waterbody. The map also indicates the specific public advisory level – Caution, Warning or Danger -- based on cyanotoxin testing results and/or visual indicators confirming the presence of a HAB.

Red and orange dots indicate waterbodies with limited water recreation (i.e., no swimming) due to elevated levels of cyanotoxins, though it is important to understand that HAB location and toxicity can change quickly and, as a result, the data in this map are subject to revisions as new information becomes available. The interactive map will go public August 29 and can be viewed at the [HABs portal](#).

While harmful algal blooms may be a new health hazard to many in the general public, algae and cyanobacteria have existed for billions of years as essential components of freshwater ecosystems. Only when certain conditions trigger their growth – hot weather, slow-moving or stagnant water and excessive nutrient input – do they multiply rapidly and become a health threat.

It is important to distinguish cyanobacteria/HABs from green algae and other non-toxic water plants. HABs can be a variety of colors such as green, white, red or brown and may look like thick paint floating on the water. Cyanobacteria blooms have a grainy, sawdust-like appearance of individual colonies. For help identifying a HAB, check out this [visual guide fact sheet](#) available on the HABs Portal.

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