



Media Release

Make It a Habit and Be Mindful Of HABs – Harmful Algal Blooms

*State Water Board Says Keep Pets, Children
out of the Water if a Bloom is Spotted*

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SACRAMENTO -- With summer just around the corner, the warm weather will once again draw millions of Californians to waterways throughout the state for good times and relaxation. While there are all kinds of water safety issues to be aware of, the State Water Resources Control Board wants the public to know about one that may not be so obvious -- freshwater harmful algal blooms, or HABs.

As California confronts the realities of climate change, HABs have become increasingly common in rivers, lakes and reservoirs, and they can be especially dangerous to children and pets.

Here's why: Most freshwater HABs are formed by cyanobacteria (formerly called blue-green algae). They're actually microbes that live in nearly every habitat on land and in the water, and they generally don't become a problem until the right mix of higher water temperatures, slow-moving water and excessive nutrients causes cyanobacteria to rapidly multiply and form HABs.

Cyanobacteria are capable of producing toxins, which have the potential to harm people, pets, wildlife, or livestock. Dogs and children are most likely to be affected by HABs because of their smaller body size, increased potential to ingest water, and tendency to stay in the water for longer periods. Exposure to cyanobacteria and associated toxins can cause eye irritation, skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea and cold or flu-like symptoms.

The State Water Board and the nine Regional Water Boards (known as the Water Boards), in partnership with other programs and agencies, are actively supporting and coordinating a statewide HAB incident response with many publicly available resources. In 2018, the Water Boards received 190 voluntary reports of HABs from across the state. To learn how to stay safe around HABs, report a bloom and more, visit the CA HABs Portal:

<http://www.mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/>



Pets are most vulnerable to a HABs outbreak. They tend to drink while in the water and lick their fur afterward, increasing their exposure and risk of illness. Symptoms of animal illness include: vomiting and/or diarrhea, lethargy, abnormal liver function test results, difficulty breathing, foaming at the mouth, muscle twitching and sometimes death. More information about health impacts for domestic animals and livestock can be found on the HABs Portal [Domestic Animals](#) webpage, which includes a fact sheet for veterinarians, with technical information on assessing exposure history, evaluating clinical signs, pursuing diagnosis and confirmatory testing, patient management, and reporting to proper authorities.

The good news is that HABs can be [quickly identified](#) – and avoided – if you know what to look for and have algae in mind when recreating near waterways.

The crucial first step to staying safe during an outing on or near a waterway is to [distinguish cyanobacteria from other algae and 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. Not all HABs will appear on the water's surface. Some form mats at the bottom of a waterbody (such as in wadeable rivers), and others float at various depths.

The California Water Boards recommend that people practice [healthy water habits](#) while enjoying the outdoors this summer at your local lake, river or stream:

- Heed instructions on posted advisories if present
- Avoid algae and scum in the water and on the shore
- Keep an eye on children and pets (dogs)
- If you think a HAB is present, do not let pets and other animals go into or drink the water, or eat scum/algae accumulations on the shore
- Don't drink the water or use it for cooking
- Wash yourself, your family and your pets with clean water after water play
- If you catch fish, throw away guts and clean fillets with tap water or bottled water before cooking
- Avoid eating shellfish if you think a HAB is present

Get medical treatment immediately if you think that you, your pet, or livestock has gotten sick after going in the water. Be sure to alert the medical professional to the possible contact with cyanobacteria. Also, make sure to contact the local county public health department.

To report a bloom, do one of the following:

- Fill out the Bloom Report form on the HABs Portal: <https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/do/bloomreport.html>
- Email: CyanoHAB.reports@waterboards.ca.gov
- Call the HABs hotline: 1-844-729-6466 (toll free)
- Contact your County Public Health Office

For more information about HABs, please visit:

California Harmful Algal Blooms [Portal](#)

California Cyanobacteria and Harmful Algal Bloom [\(CCHAB\) Network](#):

California Department of Public Health [Resource Page](#)