

What are blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae (also known as **cyanobacteria**) are common and natural to our waters and found throughout Vermont. Cyanobacteria thrive in nutrient-rich water and can multiply rapidly to form blooms and scums, particularly during the warm days of summer and early fall.



A blue-green algae bloom:

- Resembles thick “pea soup”.
- Looks like “spilled paint” on the water’s surface.
- Creates a thick mat of foam along the shoreline.
- Is generally green or blue-green in color, although it can be brown, purple or white.
- Is made up of small specks or blobs floating at or just below the water surface.

A blue-green algae bloom is **NOT**:

- Stringy, made up of long bright grass-green strands that feel either slimy or cottony. This is harmless green algae.
- Mustard yellow in color. This probably is pollen.

For a photo gallery of what is and is not a blue-green algae bloom use the following link:

http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/bg_algae/photos.aspx

What are the health effects?

General health effects caused by exposure to blue-green algae:

- **Rashes or other skin irritations.**
- **Allergy-like reactions, runny nose or sore throat.**

Some blue-green algae naturally produce toxins or poisons. When these toxins are ingested in large amounts they can cause:

- Severe **stomach problems** like diarrhea and vomiting.
- **Liver damage** that may take hours or days to show up in people or animals.
- **Numb limbs, tingling fingers and toes or dizziness.**

Possible health effects of animal exposure to a toxic bloom:

- Weakness, staggering
- Difficulty breathing
- Convulsions
- Vomiting or diarrhea

Signs of a toxic bloom may include: a large number of dead fish, waterfowl or other animals, or sudden, unexplained sickness or death of a cat or dog that has been exposed. It is not possible to tell if cyanobacteria are toxic by looking at them.

There is ongoing research on potential health effects of exposure to the toxins produced by some species of cyanobacteria. The Vermont Department of Health evaluates any new findings and makes updates to guidance materials as necessary.

How might I be exposed?

Examples of ways in which one can be exposed to blue-green algae:

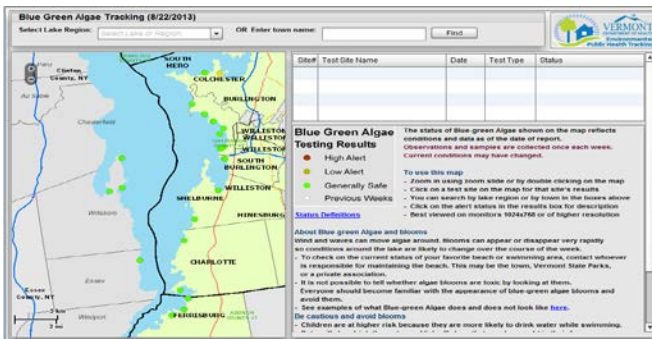
- Boating, jet-skiing, swimming and other recreational activities near or through blooms.
- Drinking untreated water with toxins present.

Children and pets have a higher risk of exposure to blue-green algae because they are more likely to play near the shoreline where blooms are often thickest and because they are more likely to ingest this water. Public water systems on Lake Champlain work with state partners to monitor blooms that could impact the quality of drinking water.

How can I protect myself?

Avoid contact with surface scums of blue-green algae or with water that appears deeply green, blue or white in color.

During the summer, the location of known blooms on Lake Champlain and selected Vermont lakes is tracked on a web-based map maintained by the Vermont Department of Health.



<https://webmail.vdh.state.vt.us/vtracking/bluegreenalgae/>

Data for the map are provided by a network of volunteers trained and coordinated by the Lake Champlain Committee, and from scientists from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Health. Volunteers submit weekly visual observations of water conditions from sites around Lake Champlain. The map offers the most up-to-date information about the status of blooms, but conditions can change rapidly over time and distance. Contact the Lake Champlain Committee if you would like to participate in the monitoring program. <http://www.lakechamplaincommittee.org/>

What should I do if I see a bloom?

- Avoid all contact with water containing the blue-green algae.
- Keep pets and livestock away from the water.
- Contact your town health officer.
- Call: (802) 863-7220 or (800) 439-8550 or E-mail AHS.VDHBlueGreenAlgae@state.vt.us to report a bloom.

Only laboratory tests of water samples can confirm whether a bloom is toxic.

What can I do to prevent blooms?

- If you fertilize your lawn, use only the recommended amount of phosphorus-free fertilizer.
- Keep fertilizers out of storm drains and off driveways and sidewalks.
- Properly care for and maintain your septic system.

Learn more: Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Watershed Management Division
http://www.watershedmanagement.vt.gov/lakes/html/lp_cyanobacteria.htm

Where can I get more information?

Vermont Department of Health:

Call: (802) 863-7220 or (800) 439-8550

Website URL:

http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/bg_algae/bgalgae.aspx

E-mail: AHS.VDHBlueGreenAlgae@state.vt.us

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation:

Call: (802) 490-6130

Website URL:

http://www.watershedmanagement.vt.gov/lakes/html/lp_cyanobacteria.htm

Lake Champlain Committee:

Call: (802) 658-1414

Website URL:

<http://www.lakechamplaincommittee.org/>

E-mail: lcc@lakechamplaincommittee.org

Lake Champlain Basin Program:

Call: (802) 372-3213 or (800) 468-5227 (NY & VT)

Website URL: <http://www.lcbp.org/>

E-mail: lcbbp@lcbp.org

