

Blue-Green Algae in Delaware Freshwaters

FACT SHEET

Blue-green algae, also known as Cyanobacteria, occur naturally in freshwaters worldwide and are found each year throughout Delaware on ponds and lakes of all sizes and in some tidal fresh waters.



During summer and into early fall blue-green algae give many ponds a “murky” appearance and sometimes form a “paint-like” scum on the water surface that is commonly referred to as “pond scum.” The water and scum are typically pea-green in color but can also exhibit combinations of several colors including blue-green, white, brown and red. A “swampy” odor can be present.

Some blue-green algae in Delaware ponds can produce toxins. Toxins are chemical compounds. They are produced by the algal cell and, if contacted or swallowed, can be harmful to people and animals. Blue-green algae may not always be producing toxin even if they have the

capability to do so. It is not possible to know if algae are producing toxins without laboratory tests. It is also not possible to predict when algae will produce toxins. Because of this, ponds, lakes and tidal fresh waters that show signs of blue-green algae should be approached with care.

No cases of human or animal illness associated with blue-green algae exposure have ever been reported in Delaware; however all waters that have algae should be treated with caution, particularly waters that have scum.

For Humans and Animals, contact with water containing blue-green algal toxins may result in health problems that include:

- Skin rashes, hives or blisters
- Irritation of eyes and nose, sore throat, and breathing problems
- Stomach cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, fever, muscle weakness. In extreme cases, pneumonia, liver damage, and kidney failure have been reported.

Use common sense when near ponds, lakes and other freshwater bodies and please follow this advice:

- Do not swallow water from any waterway.
- Do not swim, water ski, play, or wade in areas of scum.



- Avoid scum while boating.
- Avoid exposure to water with blue-green algae scum or wear gloves, if unavoidable.
- Avoid blue-green algae areas, especially if you suffer from asthma, hay fever or allergies.
- Do not let pets or livestock drink or get into water where scum is present.
- Do not feed waterfowl in or near scum areas.
- Do not cook or wash food in pond water.

Clean fish properly and follow fish consumption advisories found on DNREC's website at

<https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/fishing/consumption-advisories/> .

If you or your pet is exposed to blue-green algae scum:

- Wash thoroughly to remove all traces of scum.
- If you or your pet becomes ill after contact with pond water, call your family doctor or veterinarian.