MISSOULA PUBLIC HEALTH
MISSOULA PARKS AND RECREATION
AUGUST 1, 2025

URGENT SAFETY ADVISORY:

Stay out of Bancroft Ponds and Cattail Corner- harmful algae detected

Immediate action required - keep people and pets away from:

- **Bancroft Ponds** (Bancroft and SW Higgins) – Harmful algae has been detected.
- **Cattail Corner** (Russell and 39th Street) – possible harmful algae detected.
- Harmful algae are naturally occurring microscopic organisms that can multiply rapidly in warm, stagnant water and produce toxins that are dangerous to humans, pets, and wildlife.

Critical - do not:

- **Swim, wade, or touch the water.**
- **Let pets near the water (pets are always prohibited from swimming in city wetlands.)**
- **Allow children to play near the water's edge.**

Harmful algae can make you seriously ill!

Symptoms include:

- Upset stomach
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- In severe cases: liver or kidney damage
- **If you or family members get sick after being near the water, seek medical attention immediately.**
- **If your pet shows illness signs after being near the water, contact your veterinarian right away.**

Warning signs to watch for:

- Water that looks discolored or unusual
- Scum or foam on the surface
- Bad smell coming from the water

If you see these signs at any water body, stay away!

Other city wetlands status:

- Silver Lagoon, McCormick Park: Currently free of harmful algae but being monitored regularly.
- For safety, avoid shallow, warm, stagnant water when outdoor and water temperatures remain high.
- **Reminder**: Pets are always prohibited from swimming in all city wetlands.
- Wildlife impact: We do not expect the algal bloom to affect ducks, birds, and fish unless the situation worsens significantly.

Learn more:

- For statewide harmful algal bloom map and reporting: www.hab.mt.gov
- Please see the attached information from the MT Department of Environmental Quality and EPA.
- Questions?
    - Missoula Public Health, Environmental Health Division 406-258-4755 or envhealth@missoulacounty.us.
    - Park Operations: 406-523-6253, parksrec@ci.missoula.mt.us, www.missoulaparks.org

When will the advisory be lifted?

We're working with Missoula Public Health to test water regularly. We'll notify you and remove signs when the advisory is lifted.

What can be done to resolve the issue?

The most effective way to eliminate harmful algal blooms is to add cold, moving water to lower the pond's water temperature. Unfortunately, both affected areas are fed by Pattee Creek, which is running low due to drought conditions.

Most of Montana, including the Missoula area, is experiencing moderate to extreme drought conditions. This is Montana's fifth consecutive year of drought, and low snowpack and hot, dry summers have significantly impacted water resources.

If outdoor temperatures cool next week and the water temperature drops, that will help reduce the algae. Harmful algal blooms thrive in warm water and gradually dissipate as temperatures cool.

There are no chemicals or additives that can immediately and safely resolve a harmful algal bloom.

What causes harmful algal blooms?

Harmful algal blooms occur naturally under certain conditions:

- High summer temperatures
- Slow-moving or stagnant water (like ponds)
- Low water levels due to drought
- Nutrient pollution in the water

Harmful algal blooms are more common in warm, still water and less likely in cold, flowing streams.

Can residents help prevent future blooms?

Yes! Reduce nutrient pollution that feeds algae:

- Use phosphorus-free fertilizers (look for 0 as the middle number, like 10-0-10).
- Keep fertilizers off sidewalks and streets where they wash into storm drains.
- Always pick up pet waste - it contains high levels of nutrients.
- Direct sprinklers and downspouts away from streets and storm drains.

Are harmful algal blooms becoming more common?

Unfortunately, climate trends make harmful algal blooms more likely:

- Rising summer temperatures and longer hot seasons create ideal algae conditions.
- Montana's ongoing multi-year drought reduces water flow and concentrates nutrients.
- More intense storms increase nutrient runoff when rains do occur.

Bottom line: Harmful algal blooms may become a more regular summer concern in Missoula County, making community-wide prevention efforts increasingly important.

Please share this information with friends, family, and neighbors who use these areas!

This advisory remains in effect until further notice. Your safety is our top priority.

LOOK OUT FOR

HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

A **harmful algal bloom (HAB)** is an overgrowth of algae in a water body that could affect water quality and aquatic life. Some HABs produced by bacteria can create toxins that may also harm people, animals, and the local environment.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOM

Algal blooms can make the water appear green, brown, gold, or red. They often produce scum, mats, foam, or paint-like streaks in the water or clumps on the shore. However, only professional water testing can confirm if HABs and toxins are present. State and local governments often test water for bacteria or toxins to protect water quality as part of their water quality standards program.

WHEN IN DOUBT, STAY OUT!

STAY AWAY FROM THE WATER WHEN YOU SUSPECT A HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOM IS PRESENT.

DON'T Play with scum or mats on the shore

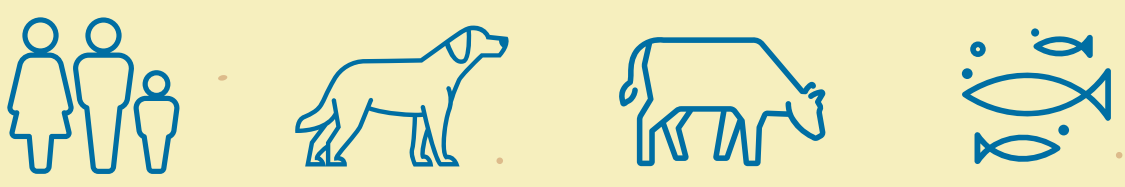
DON'T Let animals drink water, eat algae, or swim

DON'T Swim

DON'T Fish or wade

DON'T Boat or kayak

WHO CAN GET SICK FROM A HAB?



Adults and children

Household pets

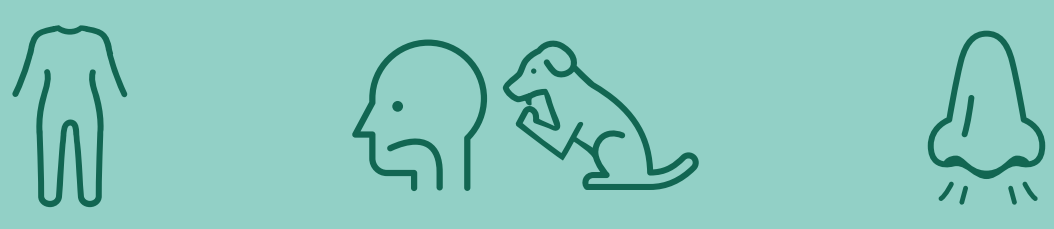
Livestock

Fish and shellfish

ROUTES & SYMPTOMS OF EXPOSURE TO HABs

SYMPTOMS CAN VARY DEPENDING ON HOW THE PERSON OR ANIMAL WAS EXPOSED, AND WHETHER THE HAB IS IN SALT OR FRESH WATER.

ROUTES OF EXPOSURE



SKIN CONTACT

INGESTION

INHALATION

SYMPTOMS OF EXPOSURE

Ear, eye, nose, skin, and throat irritation, and headache

Paralysis, respiratory illness, and seizures

Abdominal pain, diarrhea, liver and kidney damage, and vomiting

Drooling, diarrhea, low energy, not eating, stumbling, tremors, and vomiting

WHAT TO DO IF EXPOSED TO A HAB

See a doctor or vet if symptoms occur

Contact your poison control center for advice

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REPORT POSSIBLE HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS:

1-888-849-2938 **www.hab.mt.gov**

EPA

Harmful Algal Blooms

A Fact Sheet from the State of Montana

DEQ MONTANA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Cyanobacteria

Cyanobacteria

What is a harmful algal bloom (HAB)?

A harmful algal bloom (HAB) is a rapid overgrowth of blue-green algae, also called cyanobacteria. Cyanobacteria are native, tiny plant-like organisms that commonly occur in low densities in Montana's lakes, streams, and reservoirs.

How do I spot a HAB?

HABs can resemble:

- pea soup
- spilled paint
- grass clippings

HABs may appear as a blue-green discoloration along rocks and shorelines.

Cyanobacteria are often confused with green algae since both can produce overgrowths (blooms). Green algae can resemble string, horsehair or moss. Green algae do not produce toxins and are not harmful.

Green Algae

Are HABs toxic?

HABs can release cyanotoxins that pose serious health risks to humans, pets, livestock, and wildlife if exposed. Exposure can occur through ingestion of contaminated water or food, including fish, and through skin contact during recreational activities such as swimming or waterskiing.

HABs do not always release toxins. If toxins are released, they can remain in the water after the algal bloom dissipates. A water sample is the only way to know if toxins are present.

What causes HABs?

HABs occur when water conditions (temperature, sunlight, and nutrient levels) promote a rapid over-growth of cyanobacteria. This usually occurs in summer and fall in Montana.

Human influences such as excess nutrients from land-based sources and higher water temperatures are contributing to increased frequency and duration.

When in Doubt, Stay Out.

Avoid contact with water if a HAB is suspected.

Report and track suspected HABs at: HAB.mt.gov

What are the symptoms in humans?

Cyanotoxin exposure in humans can cause skin rash, stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, coughing, or irritations of eyes, nose or throat. More severe symptoms may include liver damage, seizure and irregular heartbeat.

What are the symptoms in animals?

After swimming in or drinking toxin-contaminated water, animals may experience vomiting, loss of energy, stumbling and falling, and seizures. Cyanotoxins can make animals very sick and may cause death within hours or days.

When In Doubt, Stay Out

Stay out of water that looks discolored, smells bad, or has scum, globs, or mats of algae

Can I treat my water to remove toxins?

Conventional treatment and disinfection methods are not effective in removing or deactivating cyanotoxins. Boiling water does not remove toxins, and instead, breaks the cell wall to release more toxins. Use bottled water or a safe water source if a HAB is suspected.

How likely is it that my drinking water has cyanotoxins?

Water supplied by a Public Water System should be safe for consumption and use. If the water should become unsafe, the water system will issue an alert.

If you source your own water from a lake or reservoir, monitor the waterbody for HABs and contact your local health department if a HAB is suspected. Water sourced from a well is not expected to be at risk from HABs.

Report suspected HABs at: HAB.mt.gov

Track reports of HABs before you head out to the water

Can I recreate on lakes with HABs?

Recreationists can still safely camp and picnic at waters experiencing a HAB. However, you should avoid any direct contact with water. Supervise children and pets so they don't touch or swallow the water.

Are fish safe to eat?

HABs can pose potential heath risks to humans through fish consumption. It is advised to avoid fish taken from waters with a known or potential HAB, particularly if the fish appear sickly or sluggish.

What should I do if I come into contact with a HAB?

If you have symptoms:

- Contact your health care provider
- Call Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

What if my pet or livestock swims in or drinks water with a HAB?

- Contact your veterinarian
- Call the Pet Poison Helpline: 1-855-764-7661

DEQ Montana Department of Environmental Quality

MONTANA DPHHS

For more information
email: HAB@mt.gov
call: 1-888-849-2938