

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Algal Blooms: Why the Water Turns that Funny Green

In late summer and into the fall, people may see a strange substance floating in or on local ponds, lake or streams. It may look like clumps of grass clippings or curds of green cottage cheese -- or there may be a strong green color in the water. What you are looking at most likely is blue-green algae. Blue green algae are microscopic organisms, often considered as simple aquatic plants that do not have roots, stems or leaves. Algae are naturally occurring in the environment. Algae growths can range in size from microscopic to several feet in length. And when conditions are right, they grow fast or 'bloom'.

An algal bloom is characterized by a pea green tint to the water. Blooms sometimes appear to have the consistency of paint or scum and floats on the surface. The severity of a bloom will fluctuate over the course of a day, depending on wind speed, direction and light intensity.

The following actions can be taken to reduce health risks commonly associated with blooms:

- Avoid areas with visible algae and/or scums. Direct contact and ingestion are associated with the greatest health risk.
- If no scums are visible, but water shows a strong greenish discoloration such that you cannot see your feet when standing knee deep (after sediment has settled) avoid bathing, immersion of head, and/or ingestion.
- Avoid waterskiing in visible scums or waters with a strong greenish coloration as described above because of the potentially substantial risk of exposure to aerosols.
- If sailing, sail boarding or undertaking any other activity likely to involve accidental immersion, wear clothing that is loose fitting in the openings. Use of wet suits for

water sports may result in greater risk of rashes, as the algal material trapped in the wet suit will be in contact with the skin for longer periods of time.

- After coming ashore, shower or wash to remove algal material.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality have not set a standard for Blue Green Algae. For additional information on blue-green algae visit the following websites.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/hab/cyanobacteria/default.htm
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-ead-tas-algae.pdf

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