

Safety Alert - Blue-Green Algae

A recent incident involved rowers suffering significant skin rashes following extensive exposure to blue-green algae.

Blue-green algae, sometimes known as “pond scum” can live in freshwater, salt water, or in mixed “brackish” water. They can multiply quickly and form “blooms” in lakes with high nutrient levels, particularly when the water is warm and the weather is calm. Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins.

People can become ill if they have direct contact with a blue-green algae bloom, by either swallowing water, or by having direct skin contact.

Pets and other animals that drink from the water’s edge, where scum layers accumulate, can be exposed to deadly levels of toxins. Pets can also get sick if they have been swimming.

Exposure to blue-green algae will usually only cause mild symptoms but can cause breathing problems, stomach upsets, skin reactions, and even liver damage if large amounts are absorbed. Symptoms may take hours or days to appear in people or animals, but normally appear within one week after exposure.

It is best to minimise contact with water containing algal blooms. Where contact may have occurred: -

- Wash exposed skin and clothing with fresh water and soap.
- Keep clean and cool and use standard proprietary treatments like Calamine lotion if itching is very uncomfortable,
- See your doctor if you experience symptoms, and mention your exposure to blue green algae.
- Avoid drinking alcohol
- Do not use paracetamol

Take Care to avoid Blue-Green Algae

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