

Know the FACTS

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

Cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, are naturally occurring bacteria in Ohio's lakes, ponds and rivers. They can grow quickly when the water is warm and contains nutrient-rich pollutants. This can lead to harmful algal blooms that may produce toxins. These toxins can be dangerous if you touch, inhale or swallow the affected water.

Why are HABs a concern?

Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can affect organs like skin, liver, nervous system, kidneys and other parts of the body. Exposure to toxins can occur in different ways:

- Ingestion – drinking tap water contaminated by HABs during a water advisory or accidentally swallowing contaminated water while swimming or doing other water activities.
- Skin contact – swimming, skiing, tubing and other recreational activities in water affected by HABs.
- Inhalation – breathing in tiny water droplets from HAB-contaminated water during activities like jet-skiing or power boating.



HABs in Hamilton County: Bright green streaks of a HAB coat the surface of a local waterway.

How to recognize HABs

HABs may resemble ordinary, non-toxic algae, but there are some distinct visual signs to watch for, including:

- Bright green, blue-green or brownish water.
- Surface scum or film that looks like spilled paint.
- Water that appears like pea soup, foam streaks or green cottage cheese.

Symptoms of HAB-related illness

Talk to a doctor if you encounter contaminated water and experience any of the following symptoms:

- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Changes in urination
- Weakness, dizziness or light-headedness
- Numbness
- Difficulty breathing
- Rashes or hives
- Runny nose or sore throat
- Unusual allergic responses



**HAMILTON COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH**

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What to do if you see a bloom

- Avoid contact with discolored or scummy water.
- Keep children and pets out of suspected blooms.
- Don't swallow or drink the water.
- Rinse off immediately if contact occurs.
- Report suspected blooms to Hamilton County Public Health at **513-946-7966**.

How you can help reduce HABs

HABs are activated by nutrient-rich pollution. You can protect our waterways by:

- Limiting fertilizer use.
- Maintaining septic systems.
- Keeping pet waste out of waterways.
- Supporting local conservation efforts.

Additional resources

- Before visiting lakes or rivers for recreation, check for health advisories and water quality:
publicapps.odh.ohio.gov/beachguardpublic
- Ohio Department of Health:
odh.ohio.gov/habs
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/habs



HABs in Hamilton County: Thick, paint-like green scum from a HAB gathers along the edge of a waterway.



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