

# Cyanobacteria (aka Blue-green algae)

## What you need to know!



**What are cyanobacteria?** Cyanobacteria are simple, photosynthetic organisms that occur naturally in water and wet areas. Often mistakenly called blue-green algae, cyanobacteria are small, even microscopic organisms that when conditions are right can multiply rapidly into what is known as a bloom.

**What is a cyanobacteria bloom?** A bloom is a rapid buildup of cyanobacteria that creates a green, blue-green, white or brown color on the surface of the water. They are often found in standing water in lakes, reservoirs, ditches, ponds, streams, and rivers and can often be found in large concentrations near the shore or in coves due to wind and wave action.

**What should I do if I see a bloom?** When a bloom is present it is best to stay out of the water and to keep pets away. If you have contacted the water, wash yourself and your pet thoroughly with a clean source of water. Do not use the affected water for drinking or cooking because toxins that maybe present cannot be removed with filtration, boiling or chemical treatments. However, activities near the water such as camping, picnicking, biking, and hiking are safe.

**How do I know if a bloom is toxic?** Only a few types of cyanobacteria are known to produce cyano-toxins. Devils Lake is one of many of the lakes and reservoirs in the state that is monitored for toxic cyanobacteria blooms and the public is notified when these blooms occur. However, blooms can occur rapidly and it is important to always look for the signs of a bloom before entering the water. Also as cyano-toxins may remain in the water long after the cyanobacteria have declined in numbers, a two week waiting period should be observed after a bloom has occurred. It is always best to error on the side of caution!

**How dangerous are these cyano-toxins?** Toxins from cyanobacteria if ingested or inhaled can cause diarrhea, nausea, cramps, fainting, numbness, dizziness, tingling, paralysis and even death. Skin contact can cause rashes or irritation. High risk activities during a bloom include jet skiing, waterskiing, and swimming. Children and pets are at greatest risk.

**What causes blooms?** Warm, calm water and nutrients contribute to the rapid growth of cyanobacteria. Blooms can occur anytime of the year, but are most common between June and September.

**What about fishing?** Eating fish caught during a bloom can pose a health risk. Cleaning the fish of its guts, skin and head before cooking greatly reduces the risk. For additional information about fish consumption contact the Department of Human Services.

For more information visit



<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hab/index.shtml>

Or call DHS at 1-(877) 290-6767



Devils Lake Water  
Improvement District

[www.DLWID.org](http://www.DLWID.org)  
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# CYANO-WATCH