



What is blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, are microscopic organisms that naturally occur in water bodies like lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. They thrive in shallow, slow-moving, and warm water but can also be found in deeper, cooler areas.

Some types of blue-green algae can produce harmful toxins called cyanotoxins, which can be dangerous to humans and animals. Algae can rapidly multiply to form large masses called blooms, often appearing like green pea soup or turquoise paint.

What should I do if I see it?

If you think you see a blue-green algal bloom, avoid contact and do not drink the water. You can't tell if a bloom contains harmful toxins just by looking at it. Keep people, pets and livestock away from all suspected blooms.

- **Do not enter the water:** Avoid water that appears discolored or has surface scum. Do not swim, bathe, or allow pets and livestock to come into contact with the water.

- **Do not drink the water:** Avoid using the water for drinking, cooking, or brushing teeth.
- **Do not treat the water:** Do not attempt to treat the water with chemicals or by boiling, as this can release toxins.
- **Do not eat fish organs:** Higher levels of microcystins have been found in the livers of fish in waters that regularly experience blooms, even when a bloom is not present.

For waterbodies prone to reoccurring blue-green algal blooms, follow these best practices consistently.

- **Contact your local public health unit:** For more information about current health advisories or drinking water impacts. Visit ontario.ca/publichealth to determine your local unit.
- **Report the bloom:** Contact the ministry's Spills Action Centre at 1-866-663-8477 to report a suspected bloom or visit ontario.ca/reportpollution.

How can I help prevent it?

Although blue-green algae are naturally present in the environment, you can take important steps to help reduce the occurrence of blooms that may produce harmful toxins.



- **Reduce nutrient runoff:** Limit the use of fertilizers on lawns and gardens, as excess nutrients can wash into water bodies and promote algae growth.
- **Maintain septic systems:** Ensure septic systems are properly maintained and functioning to prevent nutrient leakage.
- **Keep a natural shoreline:** Trees and shrubs along the shoreline and plants at the water's edge can protect against erosion, enhance wildlife habitat and reduce nutrients that may fuel blooms.



- **Properly dispose of waste:** Never dump yard waste, pet waste and other organic material in or near water bodies.
- **Use phosphate-free products:** Choose phosphate-free detergents and cleaning products to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the water.

What is the ministry's role?

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) plays an important role in identifying blue-green algal blooms in Ontario. MECP shares relevant information about potential blooms with affected public health units, municipalities and conservation authorities, which facilitate public awareness as needed.



- **Gathering and assessing information:** The ministry may collect and evaluate scientific and technical data about the suspected bloom, especially if a bloom has not occurred in the location before.



- **Providing information to health units:** The ministry supplies necessary information to local public health units (PHUs), which assess the risks to human health and determine appropriate actions, such as providing public awareness.
- **Regulation and prevention:** The ministry implements regulations and programs to reduce nutrient levels in water bodies, which helps prevent the formation of nuisance and harmful algal blooms.

What is public health's role?

- **Assessing health risks:** PHUs evaluate the potential health risks associated with blue-green algal blooms.
- **Issuing advisories:** PHUs provide public health advisories and warnings to inform the community about the risks and necessary precautions, including public beach postings and drinking water concerns for non-regulated systems.
- **Providing information to members of the public:** Local PHUs take calls from impacted residents and provide information on current advisories and drinking water impacts.

What is the municipality's role?

- **Notifying residents:** Municipalities inform residents about the presence of blue-green algal blooms as directed by PHUs and provide guidance on necessary precautions.
- **Managing water systems:** They ensure that municipal drinking water systems are monitored and managed to prevent contamination from blue-green algae or its toxins.

Together, these efforts help protect public health and the environment, while ensuring that communities are well-informed and safe.

Who do I contact for help?

Get the information you need by contacting the right agency at the right time.

Public Health Unit (PHU)

- current public health advisories
- drinking water concerns
- public beach closures

Find your local PHU at ontario.ca/publichealth.

Municipality

- guidance on necessary precautions

Find contact information for your municipality at ontario.ca/municipalities.

MECP's Spills Action Centre

- report a suspected bloom

Call 1-866-663-8477 or visit ontario.ca/reportpollution.



For more information about blue-green algal blooms in Ontario, visit ontario.ca/algae

