



San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department

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JOINT NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Release #2014-13 JNT NR

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BLUE-GREEN ALGAE BLOOMS SPOTTED IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY WATERWAYS

PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE CAUTION

STOCKTON, CA (August 28, 2014) - A water quality issue that can adversely affect both people and animals is the presence of blue-green algae. The recent hot and humid weather in San Joaquin County, combined with low river flows in many of the area's waterways contribute to the rapid growth of blue-green algae blooms that may produce harmful toxins.

Only a few types of blue-green algae produce toxins, but if present, they can irritate the skin and when ingested, can cause stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting. Water-contact sports and recreational exposure to toxic blue-green algae can also cause irritation to the eyes and skin, as well as mouth ulcers. At high enough levels, these toxins may cause damage to the liver and nervous system. Exposure to algae toxins can produce numbness, tingling, dizziness and muscle weakness, which can lead to difficulty breathing or heart problems, thus requiring immediate medical attention. If you think you are experiencing symptoms related to exposure to blue-green algae, contact your doctor or the Poison Information Hotline (800-222-1222) right away. If your pet displays symptoms such as seizures, vomiting, or diarrhea after contact with surface water, contact your veterinarian right away.

Because you can't tell if an algae bloom is toxic just by looking at it, public and environmental health officials advise people to avoid swimming, wading, skiing or coming into contact with the water in areas where a green to bluish-green foam, scum or mat of algae is present. Staff from the San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department has posted Health Advisory signs at local marinas cautioning swimmers, boaters and recreational users.

Public and environmental health officials urge everyone to protect their health and that of their family, friends and pets during a blue-green algae bloom by taking these precautions:

- Keep children, pets, or livestock from swimming in the water or drinking the water.
- Avoid swallowing or inhaling water droplets, as well as skin contact with water.
- If skin contact does occur, wash with soap and water or rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove the algae.

- Avoid using the water for drinking, food preparation, bathing, or showering.
- Do not boil the water. Boiling will not remove the toxins and may even release more of the toxin into the water.
- Avoid cooking with the water because food may absorb toxins from the water during cooking.
- Do not rely on water jug filtration systems as they do not protect against the toxins.
- Do not treat the water with a disinfectant such as chlorine bleach. This may break open algae cells and release toxins into the water.
- Because toxins are more likely to collect in animal tissues, health officials recommend that people who
 choose to eat fish from waters where algae blooms are present should be cautious and remove all fat, skin
 and organs before cooking.

For more information, visit:

- San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department: http://www.sjcehd.com or call (209) 468-3420
- San Joaquin County Public Health Services: http://www.sjcphs.org
- California Department of Public Health: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx
- State Water Resources Control Board: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/bluegreen_algae/
- Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment: http://oehha.ca.gov/ecotox/microcystins.html
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: http://epa.gov/gmpo/habpage.html

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Attachments: Blue-green Algae – Frequently Asked Questions Sheet

Health Advisory for Waterways in San Joaquin County (English/Spanish)