

# Cyanobacterial Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in Idaho



Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are made of cyanobacteria that can produce toxins, collectively called cyanotoxins. These toxins can harm humans and animals. As water temperatures increase the cyanobacteria can rapidly increase in number, this quick increase is called a bloom. People and animals can be exposed to cyanotoxins while a body of water is in bloom by swallowing or touching the water during activities, such as:

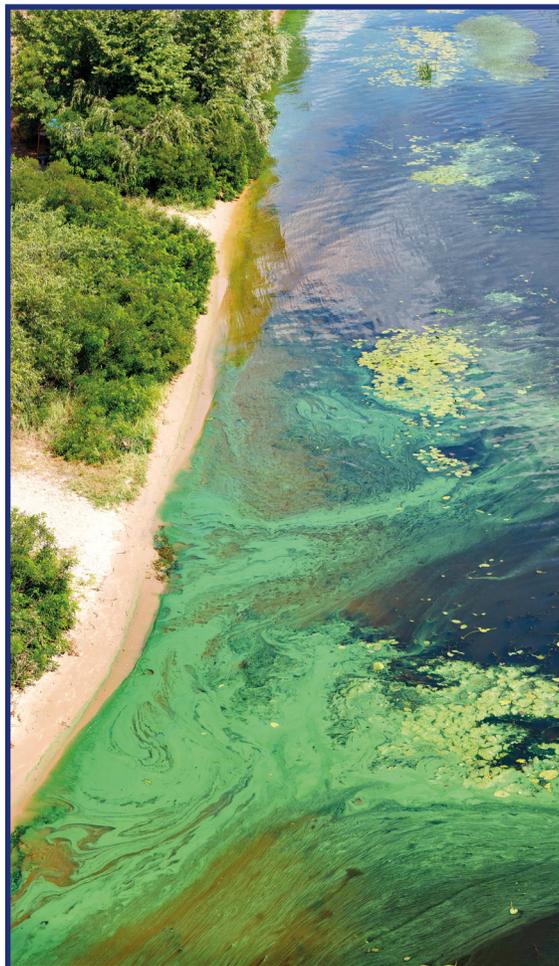
- Drinking contaminated water
- Swimming
- Playing in or near contaminated water
- Water sports
- Fishing
- Eating contaminated fish

## Cyanobacterial Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

- **Symptoms can vary depending on how a person or animal was exposed to cyanotoxins and for how long.**
  - ◇ Recreating in affected water during a HAB may irritate the skin or eyes, cause coughing or difficulty breathing or nausea from inhaling or ingesting droplets or spray.
  - ◇ If you experience irritation of the eyes or skin, have difficulty breathing, or feel nauseous, you should leave the water and seek medical care if symptoms persist.
- **When in doubt, stay out!**
  - ◇ If you see a bloom, stay out of the water, and keep your pets and livestock out of the water.
  - ◇ Please report suspected blooms to Idaho Department of Environmental Quality at (208)-373-0502 or (866) 790-4337.
- **How long after a public health advisory is lifted do I need to wait before recreating in an affected body of water?**
  - ◇ Because blooms can change rapidly, and conditions can be difficult to predict, there is currently no recommended waiting period during or after a HAB.
  - ◇ Currently, health advisories are not lifted until two consecutive weekly toxin samples are below contact recreation threshold.
  - ◇ For current information on potential blooms visit [arcg.is/yOGu0](http://arcg.is/yOGu0).

## Eating Fish from an affected body of water.

- **What precautions should I take if I want to eat the fish caught in affected water?**
  - ◇ Remove the fat, skin, and organs before cooking. Be careful not to cut into the organs.
  - ◇ Before cooking or freezing the fish, rinse the fillets with clean water.
  - ◇ Cooking fish will not remove toxins that may be in the fillet.
- **Is there a limit on how many fish I can safely eat?**
  - ◇ Due to the limited amount of research on HAB toxins in fish, no specific recommendations on fish consumption have been determined for these toxins but there may be a risk.
  - ◇ Follow Idaho's Fish Consumption recommendations when choosing to eat fish: [healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/health-wellness/environmental-health/fish-advisories](http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/health-wellness/environmental-health/fish-advisories).
- **Are there any fish that are of more concern?**
  - ◇ Fish that migrate from salt waters into fresh waters, such as salmon and steelhead, have less time to build up toxins than those that spend their entire life-cycle in freshwater, such as trout, bass, and catfish.
  - ◇ Crayfish or crawdad muscle can be eaten, but their internal organs and liquid fat should be discarded, if caught from waterbodies impacted by a bloom.
  - ◇ Include hand wipes or clean water in your equipment and wash your hands after handling a fish or changing lures, and especially before eating. Hand sanitizers will not remove cyanotoxins.



## Resources

1. Idaho HABs advisories: [www.deq.idaho.gov/water-quality/surface-water/cyanobacteria-harmful-algal-blooms](http://www.deq.idaho.gov/water-quality/surface-water/cyanobacteria-harmful-algal-blooms)
2. Report a bloom: [www.deq.idaho.gov/report-a-potential-cyanobacteria-algal-bloom](http://www.deq.idaho.gov/report-a-potential-cyanobacteria-algal-bloom)
3. Idaho Fish Consumption Advisory: [healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/health-wellness/environmental-health/fish-advisories](http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/health-wellness/environmental-health/fish-advisories)
4. Idaho Fish and Game: [idfg.idaho.gov/fish](http://idfg.idaho.gov/fish)
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB)-Associated Illness: [www.cdc.gov/habs/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/habs/index.html)

## Contact

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Environmental Health Program  
[healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/environmentalhealth](http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/environmentalhealth)  
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