

Google Groups

Be Aware: Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) are Occurring in Cayuga Lake

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Posted in group: **town-of-Ulysses**

Hello Ulysses residents

This week Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs or cyanobacteria) have once again been found in many locations throughout Cayuga Lake.

These blooms, which are occurring in lakes across the country are of great concern, and although they are happening more frequently, there are still many unanswered questions, especially for people who draw drinking water directly from the lake. The following information is from many sources.

HABs can come and go quickly. The DEC website has helpful identification photos <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/81962.html>.

Toxins associated with HABs are dangerous - The toxins from HABs vary and most often affect the nervous system, liver, and skin. The toxins associated with the HAB in Cayuga Lake are mostly contained inside the bacterial cells, so anything that kills the cells, like boiling, will release more of the toxins into the water.

Swimming - Taughannock and the Ithaca Yacht Club have had blooms this week so make sure to check before heading out for a swim. Not all beaches are monitored and the blooms can come and go quickly. The general recommendation is to stay clear of water that has had a HAB for 12 to 24 hours after the water has become visually clear of HABs. Look first. If you see green streaks, green clumps, mats, or areas that look like pea soup or green paint, don't go in.

Public drinking water - Public water supplies have ways to treat for the toxins generated by the HABs, the Trumansburg water supply is in good shape due to the water being drawn from a well, not directly from the lake. Water in Jacksonville is from Bolton Point which has ways to treat drinking water to make it safe if a bloom affects the water it draws from Cayuga Lake.

Residents who draw drinking water from the lake - This is the hardest information to find. Recommendations in a previous post from the Tompkins County Health Department says "*household water treatment such as Ultraviolet (UV), boiling, or chlorinating will not make your water safe for use. During a bloom, do not drink, prepare food, cook, or make ice with water from the lake or from beach wells*".

The toxins clear relatively quickly from the water 12-24 hours after the HABs are not visible. The recommendations against boiling, chlorine or UV light are because these methods kill the cyanobacterial cells which will then release the toxins within them into the water. Filtering the HABs out is a method sometimes used for municipal water, however for residential systems there is some concern that the reverse osmosis (RO) filter process might kill the cyanobacteria releasing toxins into the water that cannot be filtered. There are some studies that show that activated charcoal filters help reduce the toxin levels in pre-filtered water, but there is not guidance on how often these filters would need to be changed.

Please report a bloom - As a reminder, the DEC is relying on people's reports about suspected HABs. If you think you see one, **please report it** to the DEC using this form: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/suspalgformedit.pdf.

Please contact the Tompkins County Department of Health if you have further questions. From their website:
[The Health Department is advising individuals that they should be aware of the possibility of HABs and know how to identify and report blooms they might discover.](#)

1. Know It

- If water appears discolored or has an unpleasant odor, **do not drink the water and avoid contact with it.**
- To identify harmful and non-harmful algae blooms [click here for a photo gallery.](#)

2. Avoid It

- If contact occurs with suspicious blue-green algae, rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove algae. **For dogs** that may have gone in the water, prompt action is particularly important to prevent them from ingesting matter that sticks to their fur.
- **If you are not on a public water supply**, household water treatment such as Ultraviolet (UV), boiling, or chlorinating will **not** make your water safe for use. During a bloom, do not drink, prepare food, cook, or make ice with water from the lake or from beach wells.
- For current status of NYS Parks beaches and swimming sites, [Click Here](#) (PDF download from [NYS Parks](#)).

3. Report It

- **If you see a suspicious bloom**, stay out of the water and report the bloom to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation by filling out a [Suspicious Algal Bloom Report Form](#) online. Follow instructions on the form for submitting the completed form.
- **Report any HAB-related health symptoms** to the NYS Department of Health at harmfulalgae@health.ny.gov, or call the Tompkins County Health Department at (607) 274-6604.

4. For more information about HABs

- [click here for the NYS Dept of Health site](#)
- [click here for the NYS Dept of Environmental Conservation HABs page.](#)

POSTER (PDF download): [HAB Awareness Poster](#)

In defense of clean water,

-Liz