



# Harmful Algal Blooms: Veterinarians

## What are harmful algal blooms?

Cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, are a natural part of lakes, rivers, and ponds. Unfortunately, some cyanobacteria can produce toxins, called cyanotoxins, that can make animals and people sick. When conditions are right, these organisms can increase rapidly to form cyanobacterial blooms—or Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).

A HAB can last several weeks and happen when the water temperature is warm, calm, and has a high level of nutrients such as phosphorus or nitrogen. HABs can look like scums in the water and may have small flecks, foams, or sometimes globs and mats floating in it. The water can also look like it has spilled paint or a green sheen on the surface.

## What are the health effects on pets and livestock?

Animals, especially dogs, typically get ill from HABs when they swim in or ingest water from toxin-containing water bodies. Symptoms can develop very quickly and may include lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, drooling and seizures. This is an urgent situation, as death of the animal can occur rapidly depending on how much toxin is consumed.

An animal that has had contact with suspected contaminated water should be taken to a veterinarian immediately for examination and possible treatment. Samples of fur and stomach contents may be sent to a veterinary diagnostic lab for diagnosis.

## What is advised for clients concerned about HABs?

- Clients and their pets should not swim or drink water from areas of water bodies that could have HABs in them. If most of the water body appears to be affected, they should completely avoid it.
- Bathe a pet if it swam in suspect or known HAB-affected water.
- Seek veterinary care if an animal may have ingested contaminated water.

## How do you report HABs and illnesses related to HABs?

Algal toxicities in animals are reportable. Report a case by contacting the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development by completing and submitting a Reporting a Reportable Disease Form found at [www.michigan.gov/dvmresources](http://www.michigan.gov/dvmresources) under "Reportable Diseases." Once complete, submit the form and any questions to [mireportableanimal@michigan.gov](mailto:mireportableanimal@michigan.gov).

Clients should always report suspicious looking algae to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) by calling 800-662-9278 or emailing [AlgaeBloom@michigan.gov](mailto:AlgaeBloom@michigan.gov). If clients may have had contact with water containing cyanotoxins and become sick, they should seek medical treatment or call Poison Control at 800-222-1222.



More information on HABs can be found on  
EGLE's website at [www.Michigan.gov/EGLE](http://www.Michigan.gov/EGLE).