

Harmful Algal Blooms

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) occur when excessive amounts of toxin-producing blue-green algae (also called cyanobacteria) grow in lakes. Cyanobacteria can release toxins into the water that, at elevated levels, cause health concerns. HABs are most common during the hot summer months in nutrient-enriched lakes.

It is essential to recognize that algae occur naturally and are important ecologically. Algae form the base of the food chain and, without algae, a lake would not be able to support fish and other aquatic organisms. Not all algae are toxic, in fact, few are.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a recreational standard of 20 parts per billion for cyanotoxins, above which recreational contact with water should be avoided. In random testing conducted to date by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), the vast majority of lakes tested did not have active cyanobacteria blooms occurring (EGLE 2019). EGLE concluded that HABs do not appear to be a widespread problem in Michigan. Historical water quality data available for the Huron River Chain of Lakes indicate that nutrient levels and algal abundance are relatively low and may not be conducive to the persistence of HABs.

The Michigan Departments of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and EGLE sample for HABs on a limited basis and work with local health departments to protect the public when toxins are discovered. Suspicious-looking algae can be reported to EGLE by calling the Environmental Assistance Center at 1-800-662-9278 or sending an e-mail to AlgaeBloom@Michigan.gov.

Visual observation alone can't be used to predict HAB toxicity. If you observe what appears to be a HAB, it is best to physically avoid that area of the water body. As a general precaution, discourage pets from drinking algae-infested water, and if your pet wanders into algae-infested waters, a good rinse or bath in fresh water is recommended.

To find out more about harmful algal blooms, visit michigan.gov/habs.

Reference:

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy. 2019. Algal Toxin Monitoring in Michigan Inland Lakes: 2016 – 2018 Results. MI/EGLE/WRD – 19/13.



For more information regarding Michigan's inland lakes, please visit michiganlakeinfo.com

