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**State and local agencies continue to provide education and study Harmful Algal Blooms**

As Montanans and visitors head to the lake for late summer fun, public health officials urge citizens to know the health risks of Harmful Algal Blooms, or “HABs”.

HABs are caused by blue-green algae that are native to Montana’s freshwater lakes and reservoirs. Not all varieties of blue-green algae are harmful, but some can produce dangerous cyanotoxins. Blue-green algae blooms often look like pea soup, grass clippings or green latex paint. The algae are usually suspended in the water or appear as floating mats; they do not grow from the bottom like roots, mosses, or water plants.

Scientists believe that blooms are occurring at more locations, with increased frequency and for a longer time. Potential causes include warmer water temperatures, longer summer growing seasons and increased nitrogen and phosphorous runoff from a variety of human activities. Under certain conditions HABs can produce toxins that damage the skin, liver and nerve cells. These toxins can make people and animals sick, and at worse, exposure can be fatal.

Importantly, “children and pets are more likely to ingest HAB infested waters because they spend most of their time wading in the shallow waters where algae can accumulate, and they have less control over how much water they ingest”, said Matt Ferguson, State Toxicologist.

Hannah Riedl, water quality specialist at DEQ said, “ because we can’t track rapidly changing conditions in every body of water, we want people to be informed enough to make their own decisions. We also ask the public to help by reporting HABs so that we can respond quickly and hopefully prevent people, pets and livestock from getting sick.”

Suspected HABs can be submitted, including photos, to the website: [www.hab.mt.gov](http://www.hab.mt.gov). This site also has a live map of reported HABs and identification information. When a HAB is reported to either DEQ or directly to the Gallatin City-County Health Department it is investigated to determine whether the bloom is nuisance green algae or potentially-toxic blue-green algae. In Gallatin County, the health department then works with the entities managing the waterbody to determine whether water quality testing results warrant safety advisories.



The City of Bozeman Water Treatment Plant personnel collect and test water samples weekly from multiple locations in Hyalite Reservoir for the presence of microcystin. This testing is done from July to October. The City of Bozeman monitors Mystic Lake for signs of HABs as well throughout the summer.

Suspect a HAB? “When in doubt, stay out. Do not drink, swallow, or swim in water that shows signs of a HAB and be sure to keep kids, pets, and livestock out too” said Matt Kelley, Health Officer for Gallatin City-County Health Department. Direct contact, ingestion or inhalation of cyanotoxins may irritate the skin, eyes, nose and respiratory system or cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or headaches. If you suspect a HAB-related illness in a person or animal call Poison Control 1-800-222-1222 and seek medical attention.

Report a suspected HAB at [www.hab.mt.gov](http://www.hab.mt.gov) or call 1-888-849-2938. You may also report a suspected HAB by calling the Gallatin City-County Health Department Environmental Health at 406-582-3120.

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