



HEALTHY
GALLATIN

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GALLATIN CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For immediate release: July 28, 2023

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Detection of Harmful Algal Blooms at Hyalite Reservoir and Elk Grove Park Pond

As Montanans and visitors head to local ponds, lakes and reservoirs 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 cyanotoxin, including microcystin. 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 with roots like other water plants.

On July 26, 2023, a Harmful Algal Bloom was identified and microcystin was detected at the boat launch area at Hyalite Reservoir in the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Toxin levels appear to be low and water samples will be submitted for laboratory quantification. It may take up to a week to receive the laboratory testing results. As such, a Caution Advisory for recreational use at Hyalite Reservoir has been posted.

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 through October. The City of Bozeman treats water to remove contaminants at its treatment facility and is confident the city’s water supply has not been affected. The City of Bozeman also monitors Mystic Lake for signs of HABs throughout the summer.

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On July 27, 2023, a Harmful Algal Bloom was reported at Elk Grove Park Pond in the Elk Grove Subdivision south of Four Corners. Testing will be conducted to determine the presence of the cyanotoxins toxin. A Caution Advisory for recreational use at Elk Grove Park Pond has been posted.

In past summers, algal blooms have been identified in a number of Gallatin County surface waters in the past including Hyalite Reservoir, Mystic Lake, Hebgen Lake and numerous smaller subdivision ponds. Ongoing drought conditions and high temperatures could increase algal bloom activity in the county this summer.

The Gallatin City-County Health Department (GCCHD) encourages recreationists to exercise caution to avoid an algal bloom that could potentially produce toxins that pose a risk to people, pets, and livestock.

“We want people to be aware of the risk from the algae,” said Travis Horton, Gallatin City-County Health Department Director of Environmental Health. “People should exercise caution where algal blooms are present.”

Children 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. Pets and livestock often drink from these nearshore waters.

Because tracking rapidly changing conditions in all water bodies is not feasible, GCCHD wants people to be informed enough to make their own recreational 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. 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 water body to determine whether water quality test results warrant safety advisories.

Suspect an 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 Lori Christenson, Gallatin County Health Officer. Direct contact, ingestion or inhalation of cyanotoxins can result in symptoms within a few hours of exposure and may include: skin, ear, nose or throat irritation; respiratory issues; abdominal pain, diarrhea or vomiting; lethargy, paralysis, tremors, seizures and death in humans and animals. If you suspect a HAB-related illness in a person or animal, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 and seek medical attention.

Report a suspected HAB at 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.

