



For Immediate Release: July 24, 2023

Potential Health Risks to Recreating in Bozeman Area Waters

The Gallatin City-County Health Department (GCCHD) and the Gallatin Local Water Quality District (GLWQD) want to make sure you, your family, and your pets stay safe while recreating in the lakes, rivers, and streams in and around Gallatin County this summer. There are potential health risks to consider when recreating in freshwater, two health risks to highlight are harmful algal blooms (HABs) and *E. coli*.

“The GLWQD is providing routine water sampling at several sites within Gallatin County that are heavily used during summer recreation,” says Nick Banish, District Manager of GLWQD. “Collection of surface water samples will be taken and analyzed for *E. coli* bacteria and harmful algal bloom toxins, and the public will be notified when necessary.”

GLWQD is performing local water quality testing through the [recreational waters monitoring program](#). Test results are posted on the [GCCHD water quality page](#), as well as additional information on harmful algal blooms (HABs) and other waterborne illnesses.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

Gallatin County currently has three locations where a CAUTION advisory is posted for HABs. Valley Grove HOA Pond, Hyalite Reservoir, and Hebgen Lake near Corey Springs in the Grayling Arm. Conditions can change rapidly, GCCHD and GLWQD highly recommend [checking locations](#) for possible HABs before you recreate. Also, review ALL signage onsite for any caution advisories.

HABs are dangerous for humans and pets. Do not ignore signs posted near any body of water. HABs are a type of algae, known as cyanobacteria that can create toxins. Ingestion or prolonged contact with the algal bloom may result in illness, with impacts such as muscle twitching, staggering, convulsions, paralysis, and death. Importantly, children and pets are more likely to ingest HAB infested waters. 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.

“Health risks from HABs and *E. coli* are real and can be serious,” says Travis Horton, Environmental Health Director at GCCHD. “Please heed all posted warnings and remember, when in doubt stay out.”

Report a suspected HAB at www.hab.mt.gov or call 888-849-2938. You may also report a suspected HAB by calling GCCHD at 406-582-3120. For more information about HABs visit: [Harmful Algal Blooms \(mt.gov\)](#)

***E. coli* (Escherichia coli)**

Gallatin County has detected elevated bacteria in [Meyers Lake](#) where *E. coli* levels are above the EPA recreational water quality standards for full body contact swimming.

[E. coli is a type of bacteria](#) that lives in the intestines of people and animals. *E. coli* is commonly found in human and animal feces. Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless, but some can make people sick.

E. coli can be contracted when swallowing water while swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, or even backyard “kiddie” pools. While unintentionally swallowing water is a common cause of sickness, those with cuts, open wounds, or sores should not enter the water, as these are also pathways for bacteria to enter your body.

Symptoms of infection vary by person, but often include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), and vomiting. Some people may have a low fever. Most people get better within 5 to 7 days. Some infections are mild, but others are severe or even life-threatening. For safe swimming information, [visit the CDC’s website](#).

Contact your healthcare provider if you have diarrhea that lasts for more than 3 days or diarrhea that is accompanied by a fever higher than 102°F, bloody diarrhea, or so much vomiting that you cannot keep liquids down and you pass very little urine.

The mission for Gallatin City-County Health Department is to promote and protect health and wellbeing in our communities. For more information, visit our website www.healthygallatin.org.

Media Contact:

Holly Whaley

Communications Specialist, Gallatin City-County Health Department

holly.whaley@gallatin.mt.gov