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## **Ohio Strengthens Harmful Algal Bloom Response Strategy For Recreational Waters**

*“Know Before You Go” via BeachGuard website*

COLUMBUS – With the arrival of warmer temperatures and increased recreational water activities in Ohio, the state is further strengthening its approach to addressing harmful algal blooms in recreational waters like state park lake beaches and boat ramps.

“We are strengthening our approach by helping Ohioans better understand recreational water quality before they begin activities, and by issuing public health advisories earlier solely based on the levels of harmful algal bloom toxins,” said Dr. Mary DiOrio, medical director of the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). “As we continue to better understand harmful algal blooms and the toxins they may produce, we have eliminated the previous requirement for a probable case of an algal bloom-related human illness or a pet death before issuing an elevated recreational public health advisory.”

Other updates to the state’s harmful algal bloom strategy include designating the state’s BeachGuard website as the single resource for advising the public about recreational water quality, consolidating information previously posted separately on multiple agency websites.

“We are encouraging people to ‘know before you go’ by checking our BeachGuard website,” Dr. DiOrio said. “BeachGuard lists any recreational public health advisories and water quality data for some toxins and *E. coli* bacteria for Ohio state park lake beaches and boat ramps as well as participating non-state public and private beaches.”

BeachGuard is accessible directly at [www.odh.ohio.gov/healthybeaches](http://www.odh.ohio.gov/healthybeaches) or at [ohioalgaefinfo.com](http://ohioalgaefinfo.com) which also offers other extensive harmful algal bloom information and resources provided by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and ODH.

Some signage has been updated to help Ohioans know what the water quality is at state park beaches, boat ramps and participating non-state public and private recreational waters:

- An educational [white sign](#) will be posted at state park beaches and boat ramps. The white sign describes what algal blooms could look like and advises that people be on the alert and avoid them.

(more)

- A recreational public health advisory will be issued when an algal bloom is visually confirmed and/or when toxin levels are equal to or exceed a designated threshold. For microcystin, this threshold is 6 parts per billion. An [orange sign](#) marked "Warning" will be added to the white sign, noting that an algal bloom is present and/or algal toxins have been detected, and that swimming and wading are not recommended for children, pregnant or nursing women, those with certain medical conditions, and pets.
- An elevated recreational public health advisory will be issued when algal toxin levels are equal to or exceed a designated threshold. For microcystin, this threshold is 20 parts per billion. A [red sign](#) marked "Danger" will be added to the white sign, noting that algal toxins at unsafe levels have been detected, and to avoid all contact with the water.

A type of bacteria often called blue-green algae is commonly found in Ohio lakes, ponds, and slow-moving rivers. Under the right conditions, such as warm temperatures, sunlight, and excessive amounts of nutrients in the water which may result from rain runoff, the numbers of blue-green algae can dramatically increase or "bloom." Although many species of blue-green algae are not harmful, some can trigger algal blooms which may be visible as thick mats or scum on the surface of the water and can vary in color, including bluish-green, bright green, or even red or maroon. Microcystin has been the algal toxin most commonly found in Ohio recreational waters in recent years.

The most common ways that people and animals come into contact with algal bloom-contaminated water are by swallowing the water, through contact with skin during swimming or wading, or by breathing in aerosolized water droplets or spray such as when tubing or water skiing.

Depending on the type and levels of algal toxins in the water and type of contact, health effects of algal bloom exposure can range from a rash, hives, blisters, severe diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain to numbness, dizziness, abnormal liver function, difficulty breathing and death. These symptoms can occur more quickly and severely in dogs and other animals.

Individuals should seek medical attention if they believe that they have been exposed to algal toxins and are having adverse health effects. Contact a veterinarian immediately if pets and other animals have been exposed to contaminated water and show signs of illness.

Owners of non-state public and private recreational waters experiencing a harmful algal bloom are encouraged to follow the state's updated strategy, too. The full *State of Ohio Harmful Algal Bloom Response Strategy for Recreational Waters* is available at [ohioalgaefinfo.com](http://ohioalgaefinfo.com). The state's algal bloom strategy may continue to evolve in the future based on new information, such as after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency develops algal bloom exposure criteria which are expected to be released by 2017.

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