

Algae Reaction Symptoms Mimic Common Problems

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Did you go swimming and start coughing a couple of hours later? Go waterskiing, jet-skiing or tubing and feel a little tired? Go boating and feel nauseated? All of these symptoms could be just an everyday thing – or they could be symptoms of contact with potentially-toxic blue-green algae. Many people don't realize they are having such a reaction because the symptoms mimic common problems.

Blue-green algae are ordinary and necessary for our lakes, streams and rivers. However, some blue-green algae (also called *cyanobacteria*) can become toxic and cause many symptoms (even death in extreme instances) to both humans and animals. Exposure can occur through skin contact, inhalation (breathing in) and/or ingestion (swallowing).

The State of Wisconsin has started a program to try to track negative consequences of contacts with algae. If you think you or others (including pets) have symptoms from such contact, you should call 608-266-1120 or fill out a report on line at <http://dhs.wi.gov/eh/bluegreenalgae> You will be contacted shortly by someone from the program to get details and schedule further action.

The most common potentially-toxic types in Wisconsin are *Anabena*, *Aphanizomenon*, *Microcystis* and *Oscillatoria*. The first three are often “Annie, Fannie and Mike”. Common symptoms caused by exposure to these bacteria are:

- Skin irritations such as rashes or hives
- General body reactions such as fever, diarrhea, coughing, general throat irritation, runny nose, vomiting, nausea, headache, muscle/joint pain
- In severe cases, convulsions/seizures, paralysis, respiratory failure, even death

To avoid these problems, use common sense:

- If the water looks scummy, has a large mat of gunk or otherwise looks iffy, avoid contact
- Don't let children or pets play in shallow, scummy areas or where algae blooms are present
- Avoid jet-skiing, waterskiing or tubing over mats of algae
- Don't use raw, untreated water for drinking, cleaning food or washing gear
- Don't boil contaminated water, as this may release more toxins from the algae
- After family members come into contact with water that may be contaminated. Wash thoroughly, especially in areas covered by swimsuits (which may concentrate the algae)
- Thoroughly wash any clothing or fabric that has come into contact with the water
- If your pet or livestock come into contact with such water, wash the coat to prevent the animal from taking potentially-toxic algae in while self-cleaning

WHEN IN DOUBT, STAY OUT!