

# News Release

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For Immediate Release

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## *Algae Bloom at Lake Lowell Could Present Potential Health Problems*

**CALDWELL**—The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Southwest District Health today issued a health advisory at Lake Lowell due to a recent detection of blue-green algae blooms.

Southwest District Health and DEQ advise the public to avoid drinking, swimming in, or coming into contact with lake water where blue-green algae blooms are visible.

Blue-green algae are naturally-occurring bacteria. Under certain conditions, some types can release toxins into the water that are harmful to people, pets, and livestock. The blooms are generally green or blue-green and may form thick mats along shorelines. These may look like a surface scum or pea-soup. In this region, blooms historically appear in late-summer and dissipate in mid to late-fall. Blooms will dissipate and water quality will improve with cooler temperatures.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who are exposed to water with high concentrations of blue-green algae may experience gastroenteritis, trouble breathing, skin irritation, allergic responses, liver damage or neurotoxic reactions such as tingling fingers and toes. Symptoms in humans are rare; anyone with symptoms should seek medical attention. Boiling or filtering the water will not remove blue-green algae toxins.

Pets and livestock are vulnerable to blue-green algae and should stay out of water where blooms are visible. Pets and livestock can be exposed to blue-green algae through drinking, swimming or self-grooming, and a reaction to blue-green algae may require immediate veterinary care.

Canal users should take precautions for animal water facilities. Canals that may be affected are the Deer Flat Nampa Canal managed by the Nampa Meridian Irrigation

District and the Deer Flat Caldwell, Low Line, and North Canals managed by the Boise Project Board of Control.

Blue-green algae blooms occur in waters with high levels of nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. These pollutants are generally associated with human activities. DEQ is working with partners and landowners to implement a variety of nutrient reduction projects that can improve water quality and prevent future blooms of blue-green algae. DEQ is currently working on a plan to improve water quality that will reduce nutrient inputs to Lake Lowell.

Lake Lowell is part of the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge which is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### *Can blue-green algae make me sick?*

Yes, it is possible for blue-green algae to cause illness. Blue-green algae are capable of producing several different toxins. People may be exposed to these toxins through contact with the skin (e.g., when swimming), through inhalation (e.g., when motor boating or water skiing), or by swallowing contaminated water.

### *Can I eat fish from water containing blue-green algae?*

Some blue-green algal toxins have been shown to accumulate in the tissues of fish and shellfish, particularly in the viscera (liver, kidney, etc.). Whether or not the accumulation levels are sufficient to pose a risk to humans is uncertain, although it would depend in part on the levels of consumption and on the severity of the blue-green algae blooms where the fish or shellfish were caught or collected.

The World Health Organization advises that people who choose to eat fish taken from water where a blue-green algae bloom is present eat such fish in moderation and avoid eating the guts of the fish, where accumulation of toxins may be greatest.

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