

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Health Department Urges People to Exercise Caution if Blue-Green Algae or Harmful Algae Blooms (HAB) Appear to be Present in Bodies of Water

The DEC recently received a report of a likely cyanobacteria HAB (Harmful Algae Bloom) on Otter Lake in Oneida County. Although the size of the bloom is small and localized, exposure to any cyanobacteria HAB's can cause health effects in people and animals when water with blooms is touched, swallowed, or when airborne droplets are inhaled. This is true regardless of toxin levels; some blue-green algae produce toxins, while others do not.

Exposure to blooms and toxins can cause symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea or vomiting; skin, eye or throat irritation and allergic reactions or breathing difficulties. People and pets should avoid contact with blooms, and should rinse off with clean water if contact occurs. People can come into contact with harmful toxins through recreational water activities, drinking untreated surface water, and consuming contaminated freshwater fish or shellfish. The Oneida County Health Department recommends contacting your health care provider if symptoms following exposure to blue-green algae occur. The Health Department also is discouraging people from drawing water from the lake for domestic use at this time.

Blue-green algae, technically known as cyanobacteria, are microscopic organisms that are naturally present in lakes and streams. They usually are present in low numbers. Blue-green algae can become very abundant in warm, shallow, undisturbed surface water that receives a lot of sunlight. When this occurs, they can form blooms that discolor the water or produce floating rafts or scums on the surface of the water. Bathing beaches regulated by local health departments are periodically closed due to the occurrence of blue-green algae blooms. In addition to the possible presence of harmful toxins, reduced visibility in the water caused by algae blooms could create a drowning hazard.

For more information go to www.health.ny.gov/harmfulalgae.

Any questions or comments may be sent to HABsInfo@dec.ny.gov