



What are blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae are a type of bacteria called cyanobacteria that grow in freshwater. When conditions are right, blue-green algae blooms may secrete toxins that are harmful to people and pets. Harmful algae blooms typically occur in summer and early fall in warm, shallow, nutrient-rich lakes. You or your pet can become sick if you have contact with, inhale airborne water, or swallow water that contains blue-green algae. Remember: if in doubt, best stay out. If you or your pet is exposed to blue-green algae, rinse off thoroughly. Avoid using untreated lake water for consumption or bathing; boiling water that contains blue-green algae will not get rid of the toxins. If symptoms occur, seek medical help.

Quick Facts

Common Names	Cyanobacteria, blue-green algae
Location	Shallow & nutrient-rich lakes
Description	Bacteria that grows in freshwater and can sometimes secrete toxins
Identification	Green film on the water's surface
Health Effects	You may become sick if you have skin contact with, swallow, or inhale water droplets that contain algal toxins
Management	Limit excess nutrients that enter the water; this includes reducing pollution that travels through storm drains

How to identify blue-green algae blooms

Blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, are bacteria that grow in water and can look like algae. Blue-green algae may look like spilled green paint on the surface of water or like split pea soup. Waterbodies containing blue-green algae may give off a swampy odor. One way to identify blue-green algae is to try the 'stick test.' Use a stick to attempt to lift the algae from the water. If the algae lifts from the water, it is filamentous algae. However, if you cannot lift the algae or it clouds the water, it is likely blue-green algae. Learn more at: pca.state.mn.us/water/blue-green-algae-and-harmful-algal-blooms.

Managing blue-green algae blooms

Blue-green algae cannot be completely removed from lakes, as they are a part of the algae community. However, blue-green algae growth can be managed by limiting the amount of nutrients that enter a lake. Algae growth is fueled by the nutrient phosphorous. Too much phosphorous can cause unwanted algae growth. Phosphorous commonly enters waterbodies through storm drains. Pollutants like grass clippings, leaves, and fertilizer can release phosphorous into waterbodies. The best way to reduce phosphorous input is to sweep these pollutants off of your driveway and street. You can also help out by adopting a storm drain and keeping it clean: adopt-a-drain.org.



Harmless filamentous algae



Blue-green algae on a lake