



COUNTY OF IMPERIAL

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

March 9, 2017

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

Blue-Green Algae Blooms Can Pose Health Risk

Cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, have been detected blooming along the northern shore of the Salton Sea. Low levels of cyanobacteria are reported in this region, and additional testing is being conducted in other areas of the Salton Sea.

High levels of the cyanobacteria can pose health risks for humans and animals. A harmful algal bloom (HAB) occurs when certain types of microscopic algae grow quickly in water, typically forming visible patches that may harm the health of the environment, plants, or animals. HABs can deplete the oxygen and block the sunlight that other organisms need to live, and some HABs produce toxins that are dangerous to animals, including people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Residents and visitors to the north end of the Salton Sea are on notice to avoid contact with water contaminated by the algae bloom, and to not allow children or pets to play in or drink the scummy water.

If people or animals come in contact with contaminated water, they should wash themselves or pets thoroughly.

Humans who drink or swim in water that contains high concentrations of cyanobacteria or cyanobacterial toxins may experience gastroenteritis, skin irritation, and allergic responses. Skin contact with contaminated water can cause rash and itching, as well as conjunctivitis. Swallowing or inhaling contaminated water spray can cause nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. Upper respiratory irritation, such as wheezing, cough and shortness of breath, has been reported from inhaling air contaminated with cyanobacteria.

There are no known antidotes. Medical care is supportive.

For more information, go to <https://cdc.gov/habs/> or contact the Imperial County Public Health Department Environmental Health section at (442) 265-1888.

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