



Indiana State
Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

What is a HAB?

Algae are a necessary part of an ecosystem. An algal bloom occurs when too many algae grow, forming thick “scum” or “mats” in water. A harmful algal bloom occurs when an algal bloom produces toxins that hurt humans or animals.

How does a HAB occur?

HABs usually result from too many nutrients in the water. Nutrients can be fertilizers, or other chemicals released into a body of water. HABs are more typical during warmer weather months and occur in still (stagnant) bodies of water.

Who is affected by HABs?

Though anyone can be affected, children and animals are most at risk because they are more likely to swim in and drink contaminated water. In addition, animals’ and children’s smaller size makes them more likely to receive a harmful dose of toxins.

What are some signs of exposure to a HAB?

The toxins associated with HABs can cause multiple symptoms. Exposure may cause sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing, earache, head ache, diarrhea, vomiting, eye irritation, itchy or red skin, and blisters or hives.

How can I avoid exposure to HABs?

It is impossible to tell whether an algal bloom is toxic so it is best to avoid swimming and wading through and fishing near blooms. Shower and wash your hands after swimming or wading in lakes, rivers, and ponds. Do not allow animals to swim in or drink from water during algal blooms. Rinse off animals that have been in ponds, rivers, or lakes.

Seek appropriate medical attention if you believe you have been poisoned from algal toxins. Call your veterinarian immediately if your pet or livestock become ill.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/hab/>

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