



What are cyanobacteria?

Cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) are naturally found in fresh water in the U.S. and throughout Vermont. Under the right conditions, cyanobacteria can multiply quickly to form surface scums and dense populations known as blooms, especially during the warm days of late summer and early fall.

What does a cyanobacteria bloom look like?

Cyanobacteria blooms most commonly look like:

- Thick pea soup or spilled paint on the water's surface
- Green or blue-green in color, but can be brown, purple, red or white
- A mat of foam along the shoreline
- A mat on the surface of the water that breaks apart easily
- Small specks or blobs floating at or below the water surface

A cyanobacteria bloom does not usually look like:

- Stringy, bright grass-green, long strands that feel slimy or cottony – this is likely harmless green algae
- Mustard yellow in color – this is probably pollen

Find a video and photos of cyanobacteria at [HealthVermont.gov/cyanobacteria](https://www.healthvermont.gov/cyanobacteria).

How can I come in contact with cyanobacteria?

You may be exposed to cyanobacteria while:

- Swimming
- Boating or jet-skiing
- Water-based activities near or in blooms
- Drinking untreated surface water

Children and pets have a higher risk of being exposed to cyanobacteria because they are more likely to play near the shoreline and are more likely to swallow water.

Public water systems on Lake Champlain work with state partners to monitor blooms that might impact the quality of drinking water.

What are the health effects of being exposed to cyanobacteria?

General health effects caused by exposure to cyanobacteria cells include:

- Rashes or skin irritation
- Allergy-like reactions such as a runny nose or a sore throat

Some cyanobacteria may produce harmful compounds called cyanotoxins. When these toxins are swallowed in large amounts, they can cause:

- Sharp, severe stomach problems like diarrhea and vomiting
- Liver damage that may take hours or days to show up in people or animals
- Numb limbs, tingling fingers and toes or dizziness

Cyanobacteria toxins can also cause illness and sometimes death in pets and livestock. Possible symptoms animals may show include:

- Weakness or staggering
- Difficulty breathing
- Convulsions
- Vomiting or diarrhea

It is not possible to tell if a bloom contains harmful toxins just by looking at it. Only laboratory tests of water samples can confirm whether a bloom is toxic. When in doubt, it's best to stay out of the water.

Are lakes monitored for cyanobacteria blooms?

During the summer and early fall, Lake Champlain and some inland Vermont lakes are monitored. You can find recent reports on the Cyanobacteria Tracker Map at HealthVermont.gov/tracking/cyanobacteria-tracker.

Please note that the Cyanobacteria Tracker can help you understand where blooms have been reported recently, but it cannot tell you what the conditions are currently at your favorite swimming area. This is because bloom conditions can change rapidly, and not all locations are monitored. **It's best to learn what cyanobacteria blooms look like and stay away from them.**

What should I do if I see a cyanobacteria bloom?

- Do not come in contact with the water.
- Keep pets and livestock away from the water.
- Alert the beach manager or town health officer.
- Report the bloom at HealthVermont.gov/cyanobacteria.

Where can I get more information?

Vermont Department of Health – call 800-439-8550 or visit HealthVermont.gov/cyanobacteria

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation – call 802-490-6130 or visit dec.vermont.gov/watershed/lakes-ponds/learn-more/cyanobacteria

Lake Champlain Committee – call 802-658-1414 or visit LakeChamplainCommittee.org

Lake Champlain Basin Program – call 802-372-3213 or visit lcbp.org