

Harmful algal blooms

Clinician FAQ

What is a harmful algal bloom?

Cyanobacteria, or "blue-green algae," can grow rapidly and form a harmful algal bloom (HAB) when water is warm, slow moving, or full of nutrients. HABs usually look like foam, scum, mats, or paint on the surface water. These blooms can be harmful to people, especially when they produce cyanotoxins, which can cause illness. The most common cyanotoxins found in Utah are microcystins, cylindrospermopsins, anatoxins, and saxitoxins.

How are people exposed to HABs?

People are most often exposed when they swim, boat, or do other activities in or near water with a HAB. People can also be exposed through contaminated tap water, seafood, dietary supplements, or, infrequently, dialysis.



Advise patients: when in doubt, stay out!

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms and signs will vary depending on how someone was exposed, how long they were exposed, and types of toxins they were exposed to. Please see the diagnostic resources for more information. Signs and symptoms include:

- Rashes, hives, or blisters after **skin contact** with water
- Runny nose, sore throat, asthma, or symptoms mimicking allergic reactions after **breathing in** droplets of contaminated water
- Vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, weakness, tingling, dizziness, or trouble breathing after **swallowing** water

What is the reporting process?

- HAB-related illnesses are not reportable in the state of Utah, however, notifying your local health jurisdiction can help public health officials identify potential HABs
- Call the Utah Poison Control Center (UPCC) at (800) 222-1222 for questions about exposures to HABs
- Encourage patients to report suspected HABs to the 24-hour DEQ Environment Incidents line: (801) 536-4123

ICD-10-CM codes can be used to diagnose and record HAB-related illness:

- T65.82 Toxic effect harmful algae & algae toxins
- Z77.121 Contact with and (suspected) exposure to harmful algae and algae toxins

