



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Fishing and blue-green algae blooms

Algae are microscopic organisms that grow naturally in all waters. Under certain conditions, algae can grow into a large visible mass called a bloom. Cyanobacteria (also called blue-green algae) grow in fresh waters and can produce toxins that may cause harm to humans and animals. This information is presented in response to questions often asked by people who plan to fish in waters affected by a blue-green algae bloom.

Is it safe to eat fish caught from waters affected by a blue-green algae bloom?

- Eating fish caught from affected waters is an unknown health risk. There have been no reports of people becoming sick from eating fish caught during a bloom, but there has been no definitive research regarding the risk to human health.
- It is known that some algae toxins have been found to accumulate in fish tissues, and particularly in the internal organs such as the liver and kidneys. Toxin accumulation studies suggest that the muscle (fillet) tissue is less affected by algae toxins.

I've decided I want to eat the fish. Are there precautions I should take?

- If you decide to eat fish caught from waters affected by a blue-green algae bloom, remove the fat, skin and organs before cooking. Be careful not to cut into the organs. Before cooking or freezing the fish, rinse the fillets with clean water to remove any contaminants from the cleaning process.

What if I decide to leave the skin on when cooking or smoking the fish and remove it later?

- Removing the skin is standard public health advice regarding safe fish consumption and is a normal part of cleaning fish. However, there is no documentation that the skin poses an increased risk of exposure to algae toxins, or that leaving the skin on during cooking or smoking increases the health risk.

Is there a limit on how many fish I can safely eat?

- It is advisable to use moderation when eating fish from waters affected by a blue-green algae bloom. One or two fish meals per week is the usual recommended limit.
- Eating more than one or two meals of fish contaminated with algae toxins per week over an extended period of time could cause liver or neurological damage, but that is unlikely given the low amount of toxins in fillets and how often people eat fish.

What are the health effects of eating fish caught during a bloom?

- There have been no reports of people getting sick from eating fish caught during a bloom, but the scientific study in this area is incomplete. The Oregon Public Health Division recommends a precautionary approach of limiting consumption of these fish.

Are there any fish that are of more concern?

- Never eat freshwater clams from affected waters.
- Crayfish muscle can be eaten, but internal organs and liquid fat should be discarded.
- Anadromous fish, such as salmon and steelhead that migrate from salt waters into fresh waters affected by a bloom have very little opportunity to concentrate much toxin. They are less likely to be contaminated than fish that spend their entire lives in freshwater, such as rainbow trout.

Are there other precautions I should take while fishing?

- Avoid direct skin contact with water affected by an algae bloom. Wear protective gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with clean water when you are done fishing.

How long after a public health advisory is lifted do I need to wait before fishing?

- There is inadequate evidence of hazardous toxin accumulation in fish fillets, thus there is no recommended waiting period during or after an algae bloom.

For more information, please call the Oregon Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program at 971-673-0400 or visit our website at healthoregon.org/hab.



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