

Updated Advisory Protocol – 2026 Pilot

Overview

For more than two decades the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has issued public health advisories to caution the recreating public about the risks or presence of toxins from blooms of cyanobacteria, better known as Harmful Algae Blooms (HABs), or cyanoHABs, in Oregon's rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. OHA describes the health risks from exposure to toxins produced by cyanoHABs due to swallowing or inhaling water while participating in recreational activities at www.healthoregon.org/hab. The highest-risk human recreational activities are swimming and boating that produces spray. Over the years, OHA has regularly adapted its practices for issuing advisories according to changes in science and technology, and input from local partners.

For 2026, OHA is piloting a revised recreational cyanoHAB advisory protocol based on recent feedback from members of the public, state and federal agency staff and executive leadership, waterbody managers, local public health authority representatives, and regional recreation managers collected at the following listening session and workshops:

- December 11th Listening Session ([recording](#) and [summary document](#))
- January 26th Workshop
- March 18th Workgroup Meeting
- April 10th Workgroup Meeting

OHA will use the pilot recreational cyanoHAB advisory protocol for the 2026 cyanoHAB monitoring season to **issue, downgrade, and lift advisories** and **precautions** (all terms defined below). The recreational cyanoHAB monitoring season runs from approximately May to October. OHA will invite feedback from interested parties after the end of the season to inform future advisory practices.

Not all waterbodies in Oregon are tested for cyanotoxins. A list of waterbody monitoring sites that are routinely sampled for toxins is [available online](#). For those waterbodies that are monitored, the protocol covered in the following sections is in place to provide notice to the

public of possible or confirmed cyanoHABs in order to reduce the risk of harm to health. OHA issues an advisory when circumstances indicate toxin levels may have risen above recreational use values (RUVs), and when laboratory results confirm toxins above RUVs. OHA's RUVs are based on the most recent data and information from the Environmental Protection Agency and authoritative research studies.

OHA considers waterbodies with **advisories** *not safe* for human recreational activities and *not safe* for pets. OHA also issues **precautions** for waterbodies that *may not* be safe for human recreational activities and *may not* be safe for pets. For an **advisory**, OHA issues a press release and posts information to its website. For a **precaution**, OHA posts information to its website. In both cases, posting information at the waterbody is voluntary for the local waterbody manager (consisting of federal, state, county, or local government or agency staff).

Prior to issuing an **advisory** or **precaution**, OHA contacts waterbody managers that can assess water quality conditions in person and post signage at public access points. OHA also contacts the Local Public Health Authorities (LPHAs) associated with the county containing the waterbody when issuing an advisory and/or precaution, and provides the LPHA with cyanotoxin information, as available.

2026 Advisory Protocol

Issuing an Advisory

OHA will issue an **advisory** when:

1. Cyanotoxin concentrations are above RUVs based on a water sample collected at the site, as analyzed by an accredited lab.

Or

2. Cyanotoxins are below RUVs, or cyanotoxin results are not yet available, and any of the following extraordinary factors indicate an increased risk to human health:
 - OHA has received human or animal illness reports and, following investigation, OHA has classified as “suspect”, “probable”, or “confirmed”, based on [CDC case definitions](#).
 - Bloom intensity is consistently increasing due to hot weather or other environmental factors (based on waterbody manager or other water quality staff feedback/photos, or satellite imagery), or OHA expects the bloom to increase in intensity due to hot weather or other environmental factors (such as wind patterns or presence of fire).
 - The waterbody has a history of cyanotoxin detections above the RUV(s).

When OHA issues an **advisory**, we take the following actions:

1. Waterbody managers are asked to post advisory signs at waterbody public access sites.
2. OHA updates the program's website.
3. OHA publishes and distributes a press release.
4. OHA posts on social media accounts.
5. OHA updates a telephone hotline.

Downgrading an Advisory

OHA downgrades an **advisory to a precaution** when:

- A bloom remains present, but cyanotoxins are below RUVs following water sample analysis. In cases where the toxin value is near the RUV threshold, but waterbody conditions or the waterbody's toxin history suggest it may rise again above RUVs, OHA may require multiple samples below RUVs before downgrading. Resampling will occur when the bloom dissipates, as staff availability allows.

OHA may consider the following factors when deciding whether to downgrade from an **advisory to a precaution**:

- OHA has received recent human or animal illness reports associated with the waterbody.
- OHA reasonably expects the bloom to grow due to hot weather or other environmental conditions.
- The waterbody has a history of cyanotoxin detections above the RUV(s).

When OHA downgrades an **advisory to a precaution**, we take the following actions:

1. Waterbody managers are asked by OHA to remove advisory signs.
2. OHA updates the program website.
3. OHA publishes and distributes a press release.
4. OHA posts on social media accounts.
5. OHA updates the telephone hotline.

Lifting an Advisory

OHA will lift an **advisory** when:

- Cyanotoxins are not present after water sample analysis and the bloom has dissipated. OHA may consider the following factors when deciding whether to lift:
 - OHA has received recent human or animal illness reports within the current cyanoHAB season.
 - OHA reasonably expects the bloom to grow due to hot weather or other environmental conditions.
 - The waterbody has a history of cyanotoxin detections above the RUV(s).

When OHA lifts an **advisory**, we take the following actions:

1. Waterbody managers are requested to remove advisory signs.
2. OHA updates the program website.
3. OHA publishes and distributes a press release.
4. OHA posts on social media accounts.
5. OHA updates the telephone hotline.

2026 Precaution Protocol

Issuing a Precaution

OHA issues a **precaution** when:

- People have alerted OHA that a bloom is present through emails, calls, or reports submitted to [OHA's online bloom reporting form](#), AND natural resource specialists (e.g. OHA, DEQ, or trained local waterbody staff) have verified bloom presence.

Or

- There is a bloom, and water sample testing shows that cyanotoxins are present but are below RUVs.

When OHA issues a **precaution**, we take the following actions:

1. Waterbody managers are asked to post “precaution” **or** educational signs, if not already posted.
2. OHA updates the program website, including detailed information about the basis for the precaution.
3. OHA updates the telephone hotline.

Important additional information regarding an OHA **precaution**:

- OHA does not publish or distribute a press release, and OHA will not post messages on OHA's social media accounts.
- In cases where the presence of cyanotoxin is confirmed by laboratory testing, but the level is below RUV and a bloom isn't visible, OHA will recommend that waterbody managers post “precaution” signs to indicate OHA recommends extra caution. Waterbody managers may opt to post educational signs if not already present.
- In circumstances where other concerning factors are present, OHA may issue an advisory even when cyanotoxins are below RUVs. See above regarding criteria for issuing an advisory when toxins are below RUVs.
- Staff may not always sample a location with a precaution. Reasons for not sampling include remoteness and lack of available staff.

Lifting a Precaution

OHA lifts a **precaution** when:

- The bloom has dissipated.

When OHA lifts a **precaution**, we take the following actions:

1. If posted, OHA recommends waterbody managers remove “precaution” signs.
2. OHA updates the program website.
3. OHA updates the telephone hotline.