

## News release

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### **Health advisory for South Umpqua River at Myrtle Creek remains in effect**

The health advisory for the South Umpqua River at Myrtle Creek will remain in effect until further tests indicate that cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, is no longer a concern, according to Oregon Public Health and Douglas County public health officials.

Water samples drawn from the Myrtle Creek area on July 27 found the presence of blue-green algae that can produce toxins harmful to humans and animals.

Officials are also alerting people and pet owners who play along the South Umpqua River to avoid small pools of water that tend to form in the bedrock along the river.

“As the river ebbs and flows, pockets of water are left in the rocky formations along the shore,” said Jennifer Ketterman, coordinator of the Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance (HABS) program in the state Public Health Division. “These small pools of water are shallow, stagnant and warm – all conditions favorable to cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae.”

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In previous years and again this summer, the HABS program received reports of dog deaths at different locations along the South Umpqua River and mainstem Umpqua River. Autopsies conducted on two dogs in 2009 and 2010 confirmed their deaths were due to algae toxins.

“Unfortunately, we are unable to sample along the entire river,” Ketterman said. “However, we want people to be aware that they should avoid the small bedrock pools, because they are a specific concern.”

Ketterman said that because only a fraction of Oregon’s water bodies are monitored, it is important that people be alert for harmful algae blooms when recreating outdoors. “When in doubt, stay out,” she said. “Don’t go in water that is foamy, scummy, thick like paint, pea-green, blue-green or brownish red.”

Swallowing or inhaling water droplets from these pools should be avoided, as well as skin contact with the water. Children and pets are more vulnerable to illness and should be kept away.

People who are exposed to toxins can have symptoms of skin irritation, weakness, diarrhea, nausea, cramps and fainting. If symptoms persist or worsen it is advisable to seek medical attention.

Dogs exposed to toxins become sick almost immediately with drooling, weakness, vomiting, staggering and convulsions. Veterinary care should be sought immediately.

State drinking water officials said that weekly water samples drawn at the nearest public water system intake near Myrtle Creek have not detected algae toxins in the raw water.

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Ketterman said the river will continue to be monitored and the public will be updated when conditions are safe.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact, people are encouraged to visit the South Umpqua River and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, picnicking, boating, fishing and bird watching.

For health information, contact the Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program at 971-673-0400 or [www.healthoregon.org/hab](http://www.healthoregon.org/hab); also contact the Oregon Public Health Division toll-free information line at 1-877-290-6767 or the Douglas County Health Department at 541-440-3686.

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