

**For Immediate Release**

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**Reminder – Advisory Still in Effect for Harmful Algal Blooms in Ford Lake**  
*Residents or visitors advised to avoid touching algae or scum*

YPSILANTI, Mich., Sept.,24 2020 – Washtenaw County Health Department reminds residents that a public health advisory for harmful algal blooms in Ford Lake in Ypsilanti, Michigan remains in effect. In August and in consultation with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the Health Department issued an initial advisory. People and pets should avoid direct body contact with scums in the lake, water that is blue-green, or water that looks like it has a green sheen or spilled paint on its surface. People and pets should also avoid swallowing the lake water.

There are different types of naturally occurring algal blooms that may be seen on lakes and rivers. Most are not harmful. However, there are some that are made of cyanobacteria that have the ability to produce toxins, causing a harmful algal bloom (HAB). Earlier this summer, a Ford Lake resident notified MDHHS of a suspected HAB when they saw an area of water that had a “spilled paint” look on the surface. Additionally, testing in August confirmed microcystin toxin in the water, indicating the possibility of a HAB. This advisory is issued to alert the public to the possibility of a HAB. Residents should avoid direct body contact with scums in the lake, water that is blue-green, or water that looks like it has a green sheen or spilled paint on its surface. Water samples taken this month and observations (Sept 21) confirm conditions consistent with HAB are still present.

At this time, for your safety:

- You can swim in the water but stay away from water that has scums or mats, looks like spilled paint, or has colored streaks.
- Keep children and pets away from algae in the water or on the shore.
- Do not let pets or livestock drink the water or eat scum on the shore.
- All fish should be caught and released and not consumed. Ford Lake is under a [Do Not Eat Fish Advisory](#).
- Do not drink water from lakes, ponds, or rivers.
- Rinse people and pets off after swimming.
- When in doubt, keep people and pets out of the water.
- Call you doctor or veterinarian if you or your pet get sick after going in the water.

People can water ski, boat, and tube but it is advised that caution be taken in doing so in areas with visible algal scums. Breathing in water droplets with algae from the boat spray may cause nose and throat irritation. Swallowing large amounts of water containing cyanotoxins while swimming, wading, or playing in the water may cause flu-like symptoms, gastrointestinal illness, or neurotoxic symptoms. These may include abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, numbness, headaches, dizziness, or difficulty breathing. Swallowing large amounts of cyanotoxins can harm the liver or kidneys.

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## Testing and Monitoring

The United States Geological Services (USGS) is conducting monitoring of lakes in partnership with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). USGS took two water samples from Ford Lake in September, one near Lakeside Park near the southwest portion of the lake near the Lake Shore Apartments dock. Both samples had elevated microcystin toxin levels.

A follow up site visit by the USGS on Monday Sept 21 confirmed active, visible blooms in multiple locations of the lake.

Washtenaw County Health Department wants residents to be aware that the potential for HABs exists on the lake. Water quality may change quickly and the presence of previous microcystins in the water and visible blooms in other locations mean that residents should avoid direct body contact with scums in the lake, water that is blue-green, or water that looks like it has a green sheen or spilled paint on its surface. Residents should remain cautious about contacting algae or potential HABs until at least two additional samples of the lake test clear of algal toxins.

## Algae Blooms

Although most blooms are green algae and not harmful, there are some that are a type of cyanobacteria that have the ability to produce toxins – and can result in a HAB. These toxins may affect the liver, nervous system and/or skin.

## What causes HABs to form?

Factors that can contribute to HABs include: sunlight; low-water or low-flow conditions; calm water; warmer temperatures; and excess nutrients (phosphorus or nitrogen). The primary sources of nutrient pollution are runoff of fertilizers, animal manure, sewage treatment plant discharges, storm water runoff, car and power plant emissions, and failing septic tanks.

## What should I do if I see a HAB?

- Do not let your children or pets play in HAB debris on the shore.
- After swimming or wading in lake water, even where no HABs are visible, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Never swallow any lake or river water, whether you see HABs or not.
- Do not let pets lick HAB material from their fur or eat HAB material.
- Do not drink or cook with lake water.
- See a doctor if you or your children might be ill from HAB toxins. If your pet appears ill, contact your veterinarian.

## More Information

The Michigan Departments of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and Health and Human Services (DHHS) sample for HABs on a limited basis and work with local health departments to protect the public when toxins are discovered; however, some areas affected by HABs may go undetected. Suspicious-looking algae can be reported to EGLE by calling the Environmental Assistance Center at 1-800-662-9278 or sending an e-mail to [AlgaeBloom@Michigan.gov](mailto:AlgaeBloom@Michigan.gov). See more at [michigan.gov/habs](http://michigan.gov/habs).

## Washtenaw County Health Department

The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs. Visit us at [washtenaw.org/health](http://washtenaw.org/health) or call 734-544-6700.

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