

Toxic Algal Blooms: What you need to know

People and animals, particularly dogs, should stay out of the water at locations where toxic algal bloom warnings are in place.

The algae can produce toxins harmful to people and animals including dogs.

A low cover of algae can occur naturally but can increase rapidly during warmer months.

Algal blooms are influenced by:

- the combination of available nutrients in the water and sediments (such as nitrogen and phosphorus);
- a sustained period of low and stable flows; and
- favourable weather conditions (such as increased temperature and calm days).



Not all cyanobacterial blooms are visible and toxin concentrations can vary over short periods and can persist after the blooms disappear.

Avoid contact with the water if a health warning is in place.

Local authorities may place warning signs at affected locations but these may not be seen at the numerous river access points. Therefore people and dog-walkers should treat every low-flowing river cautiously.

How you can prevent being affected and what to do if feel sick

Exposure to algal bloom toxins may cause skin rashes, nausea, stomach cramps, tingling and numbness around the mouth and fingertips.

Visit your doctor immediately if you experience any of these symptoms. Let them know if you've had contact with algal mats or water in this area.

Dogs and other animals should be taken to a vet immediately if they have contact with these contaminated waterways.

You should also wash your hands thoroughly if you come into contact with contaminated waterways or when handling ducks, fish or shellfish from these affected locations.

No one should drink the water – even boiling the water does not remove the toxin.

It is recommended that the gut and liver of fish is removed and the fish washed with clean water before cooking or eating, if caught in affected waterways.

The gut of ducks should also be removed prior to cooking and eating.

Shellfish should not be collected or eaten if collected from affected areas.

[Find out more about potentially toxic algal blooms on the Environment Canterbury website.](#)

You can also contact your nearest Community and Public Health office for more information.

Facts about cyanobacteria in rivers

- Appears as dark brown/black mats attached to rocks in or along the riverbed.
- It often has a strong musty smell.
- Although high river levels will remove the algal bloom, detached mats can accumulate along the shore and increase the risk of exposure to toxins.

[Visit the Environment Canterbury website for information on current river warnings.](#)



Facts about cyanobacteria in lakes

- Avoid all contact if the water is cloudy, discoloured, or has small globules suspended in it.
- Nutrient overload – especially nitrate and phosphorous levels – can contribute to the risk associated with the development of toxic algae blooms in lakes.

[Visit the Environment Canterbury website for information on current lake warnings.](#)