

News Release

California Regional Water Quality Control Board
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News Release
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U.S. EPA, State and tribes, warn against Klamath River blue-green algae. Contact with blue-green algae can cause eye irritation, skin rash. Caution urged when consuming fish and shellfish.

San Francisco – Due to its potential health risks, federal, state, and tribal agencies are urging swimmers, boaters and recreational users to avoid contact with blue-green algae now blooming in the Klamath River mainstem below Iron Gate to dam to Seiad Valley in Northern California.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and California agencies including the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), Department of Public Health, and the Yurok and Karuk Tribes urge residents and recreational water users of the Klamath River to use caution or avoid getting in the water near these blooms, especially during the upcoming summer months.

“As blue-green algae can pose health risks, especially to children and pets, we urge people to be careful where they swim when visiting the Klamath River” said Alexis Strauss, the EPA’s Water Division director for the Pacific Southwest region. “We recommend that people and their pets avoid contact with the blooms, and particularly avoid swallowing or inhaling water spray in an algal bloom area.”

The algal blooms look like green, blue-green, white or brown foam, scum or mats floating on the water. Recreational exposure to toxic blue-green algae can cause eye irritation, allergic skin rash, mouth ulcer, vomiting, diarrhea, and cold and flu-like symptoms.

“This is a situation that anyone who comes into contact with water in the Klamath River should be aware of. Vacationers and the public should adjust their activities accordingly, said Catherine Kuhlman, Executive Officer, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Algal toxins were detected in shellfish from the river below Iron Gate dam, however, the risk posed to human health by consuming shellfish is still being determined by OEHHA. “Until then, people should avoid eating shellfish gathered in areas of a water body where a bloom exists. The precautions that we are recommending are reasonably simple and common sense.”

The Statewide Guidance on Harmful Algal Blooms recommends the following:

- Avoid wading and swimming in water containing visible blooms or water containing algal scums or mats.
- If no algal scums or mats are visible, you should still carefully watch young children and warn them not to swallow the water.
- Do not drink, cook or wash dishes with untreated surface water under any circumstances;
- Consuming shellfish from these waters previously tested positive for an algal toxin. People should avoid eating shellfish as public health authorities are evaluating the risk to human health.
- If fish are consumed, remove guts and liver, and rinse meat in clean drinking water.
- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water or swim through heavy scums or mats, nor lick their fur after going in the water.
- Get medical treatment immediately if you think that you, your pet, or livestock might have been poisoned by blue-green algae toxins. Be sure to alert the medical professional to the possible contact with blue-green algae.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact and when eating fish downstream from Iron Gate dam, people can still visit the river areas and enjoy camping, hiking, biking, canoeing, picnicking, or other recreational activities excluding direct contact with the algal bloom scum.

For more information, please visit:

World Health Organization Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality, 3rd Edition:
www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/dwq/gdwq3/en/index.html

California Department of Public Health:
<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx>

State Water Resources Control Board
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/bluegreen_algae/

National Center for Disease Control:
<http://www.cdc.gov/hab/cyanobacteria/facts.htm>

Siskiyou County Public Health Department:
<http://www.co.siskiyou.ca.us/phs/>
(530) 841-2100

County of Humboldt, Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Branch
<http://co.humboldt.ca.us/health/envhealth/>
(707) 445-6215

Yurok Tribe Real Time Water Quality and BGA Data
<http://exchange.yuroktribe.nsn.us/lrgsclient/stations/stations.html>

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