



Town of Hinsdale

Board of Health
39 South Street
Hinsdale, MA 01235
Public.Health@hinsdalema.gov
413-655-2300, x311

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Public Health Advisory

Cyanobacteria/blue-green algae level in Plunkett Lake

Hinsdale, MA – Responding to a concern raised by a resident/butter of Plunkett Lake, Hinsdale’s Board of Health Agent Fred Sears had water samples taken and tested for cyanobacteria. The test result revealed that a particular sample was slightly over standard health-based threshold of 70,000 cells per millimeter which determines a public health risk.

Cyanobacteria can present itself as “blue-green algae” and is found on many lakes this time of the year. The presence of the bacteria itself is not alarming. However, if the concentration exceeds a level on a cyanobacteria scale that is in excess of 70,000 cells per milliliter, public health may be at risk, triggering a Public Health Advisory. A Public Health Advisory is a precautionary measure ensuring public safety.

The Board of Health Recommends:

- Individuals should not swim, paddle, boat, or fish in any section of the waterbody where the water is discolored or where foam or mats of algae are visible on the water’s surface.
- People should rinse off with fresh water immediately if they or their pet comes into contact with the water. If they believe they or their pet are experiencing any adverse health effects, they should contact their doctor or veterinarian immediately

For additional information, the public is encouraged to visit the following websites:

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health: www.mass.gov/dph/algae
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/cyanobacterial-harmful-algal-blooms-cyanohabs-water>
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/habs/index.html>
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov/cyanohabs

The Board of Health will continue to monitor the bacteria levels and consult with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Updates on this matter will be posted on the Town’s web site and posted in the Town Hall.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Cyanobacteria Blooms FAQs

CYANOBACTERIA (BLUE-GREEN ALGAE) BLOOMS

When in doubt, it's best to keep out!

What are cyanobacteria?

Cyanobacteria, also called blue-green algae, are microscopic organisms found naturally in all types of water. These single-celled organisms live in fresh, brackish (combined salt and fresh water), and marine water. These organisms use sunlight to make their own food. In warm, nutrient-rich (high in phosphorus and nitrogen) environments, cyanobacteria can multiply quickly, creating blooms that spread across the water's surface. The blooms might become visible.

How are cyanobacteria blooms formed?

Cyanobacteria blooms form when cyanobacteria, which are normally found in the water, start to multiply very quickly. Blooms can form in warm, slow-moving waters that are rich in nutrients from sources such as fertilizer runoff or septic tank overflows. Cyanobacteria blooms need nutrients to survive. The blooms can form at any time, but most often form in late summer or early fall.

What does a cyanobacteria bloom look like?

You might or might not be able to see cyanobacteria blooms. They sometimes stay below the water's surface, they sometimes float to the surface. Some cyanobacteria blooms can look like foam, scum, or mats, particularly when the wind blows them toward a shoreline. The blooms can be blue, bright green, brown, or red. Blooms sometimes look like paint floating on the water's surface. As cyanobacteria in a bloom die, the water may smell bad, similar to rotting plants.

Why are some cyanobacteria blooms harmful?

Cyanobacteria blooms that harm people, animals, or the environment are called cyanobacteria harmful algal blooms. Harmful cyanobacteria blooms may affect people, animals, or the environment by:

- blocking the sunlight that other organisms need to live. Cyanobacteria blooms can steal the oxygen and nutrients other organisms need to live.
- making toxins, called cyanotoxins. Cyanotoxins are among the most powerful natural poisons known. They can make people, their pets, and other animals sick. Unfortunately, there are no remedies to counteract the effects.
- You cannot tell if a bloom has toxins by looking at it.

How can people and animals come in contact with cyanobacteria and cyanotoxins in the environment?

People and animals can come in contact with cyanobacteria and cyanotoxins that are in the environment by:

- drinking water that comes from a lake or reservoir that has a cyanobacteria bloom.
- Swimming or doing other recreational activities in or on waters that have cyanobacteria blooms.

How do I protect myself, my family, and my pets from cyanobacteria blooms?

To protect yourself, your family and your pets from cyanobacteria blooms:

- Don't swim, water ski, or boat in areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum, or mats of algae on the water's surface.
- Do not allow children or pets to play in or drink scummy water.
- If you do swim in water that might contain harmful cyanobacteria, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible afterward.