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Take precautions during blue-green algae blooms

Edmonton - Alberta Health Services would like to remind recreational water users to take precautions this summer as toxin producing blue-green algae blooms can develop in area lakes.

Blue-green algae bloom may appear depending on wind and temperature conditions. Algae are naturally present in many lakes.

“Blue-green algae blooms are heavy concentrations of algae which often gives the water a pea soup colour, says Dr. Predy, Senior Medical Officer of Health. “It’s best not to wade or swim in the water when algal blooms appear on the shore line.”

Under the right conditions, some forms of algae can produce toxins and become harmful. There is no visual way to predict the toxicity of an algal bloom so it is advised to treat any intense algal bloom with suspicion.

People who come into contact with or ingest water containing toxic blue-green algae may experience: skin irritation, rash, sore throat, sore red eyes, swollen lips, fever, nausea and vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Symptoms usually appear within one to three hours and resolve in one to two days. People who use contaminated water as a primary source for drinking water may develop more serious illnesses such as liver damage over time. Symptoms in children are often more pronounced because they spend more time in the water and are more likely to accidentally ingest contaminated shore water.

Dr. Predy suggests the following recommendations:

- Treat all algae blooms with caution;
- Do not swim or wade in water containing algae scum;
- Do not drink from algae-contaminated water. Boiling contaminated water does not remove toxins from the water.
- Provide an alternate source of drinking water for pets and livestock;
- Do not use affected water to wash fruits and vegetables

Residents with any other health-related concerns can call Health Link Alberta to speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 780-408-LINK (5465) or outside the local calling area, toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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