

- You can use the water for personal hygiene purposes and for washing clothes and for other normal household uses, **except if it has an unusual colour or odour.**

Private wells

If your water comes from a private well, it is unlikely to contain blue-green algae, even if it is near a contaminated body of water, unless it is subject to infiltration. In such cases, take the precautions listed above for private water intakes.

Water systems

If your water comes from a water system, you may consume and use it normally, unless otherwise advised.

Apart from blue-green algae, tap water taken directly from a lake, a river, or a stream is highly likely to be contaminated with bacteria, viruses, or parasites. It must never be consumed, unless it has been appropriately treated to remove these microorganisms (i.e., boiled, disinfected, etc.).

Fishing

Fish from contaminated water can be consumed in moderation. However, you should avoid consuming their entrails.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DEVELOP SYMPTOMS?

If you think your symptoms were caused by contact with blue-green algae (whether direct, prolonged contact or swallowing), you can phone your regional Info-Santé office at 811. If your symptoms are worrisome, you should see a doctor and specify that you have been in contact with a blue-green algal bloom.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I FIND A SICK OR DEAD ANIMAL?

If you find a sick or dead animal and you think there is a link with blue-green algae:

- In the case of a pet, call a veterinarian.
- In the case of a wild animal, call Services Québec.

HOW LONG DO THESE RECOMMENDATIONS REMAIN IN EFFECT?

These recommendations remain in effect up to 24 hours following the disappearance of the bloom, unless otherwise advised by public authorities.

Visible algal blooms?

Precautions for you and your family



Ce papier contient 30 % de fibres recyclées après consommation.
Photo: Patrick Chevette



Services Québec

By telephone

Québec City region: 418 644-4545
Montréal region: 514 644-4545
Elsewhere in Québec:
1 877 644-4545 (toll free)

By Internet

www.gouv.qc.ca

Blue-green algae, which also go by the scientific name “cyanobacteria,” grow in bodies of fresh or salt water. This ancient group of microorganisms plays an essential role in the ecological balance of various aquatic habitats.

However, they occasionally reproduce extremely rapidly, forming vast bright green or turquoise (more rarely, red) populations of algae called blooms. When this happens, certain species of these algae may produce toxins that can create a health hazard. Bathing in or drinking water contaminated with blue-green algae or their toxins can cause health problems.

Photo: Pierre Gauthier



WHAT DOES A BLOOM LOOK LIKE?

Blooms that are of concern for public health look like paint floating on the water or a “soup” of finely chopped broccoli, peas, or grass. Blue-green algae can also form viscous, green or turquoise scum. **This scum is especially dangerous.**

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS?

Health effects can appear after swallowing water contaminated by a bloom (or having recently been contaminated by a bloom). They can also appear following prolonged contact with contaminated water, such as after bathing or other water-related recreational activities. The effects are usually short-lived and not serious. However, ingesting water with high concentrations of toxins can have serious consequences. Despite this, very few serious cases have been reported in North America.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN SYMPTOMS?

Swallowing water may cause the following:

- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Headaches
- Fever

Prolonged contact may cause:

- Skin irritation
- Eye irritation
- Sore throat



It is worth remembering that these symptoms may be caused by things other than blue-green algae. For example, they may be caused by faecal matter in the water (gastroenteritis) or small larvae called cercaria (swimmer’s itch).

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF BLUE-GREEN ALGAE ARE PRESENT?

If the water is clearly contaminated by a bloom of blue-green algae (brightly coloured water or water that was brightly coloured within the past 24 hours), you should take the following precautions:

Swimming and other water-related recreational activities (kayaking, sailing, windsurfing, water-skiing, and jet-skiing):

- Avoid direct and prolonged contact with the bloom and water nearby, especially if there is any scum (wetsuits do not protect the skin); contaminated areas of public beaches must be placed off limits.



- **Keep young children away from the contaminated area (water and shore); since they are unaware of the danger, they may play in the bloom or scum.**
- Don’t let pets play in or drink the water.
- If you accidentally fall in the water, take a shower and rinse your swimsuit thoroughly with tap water.

You can still swim and enjoy other water-related recreational activities in areas of water bodies that are not contaminated with a visible blue-green algal bloom.

Tap water

Private water intakes

If there is a clearly visible blue-green algal bloom near your private water intake:

- Do not use that water for drinking, preparing drinks or ice cubes, or washing, preparing, and cooking food (WARNING: BOILING WATER DOES NOT ELIMINATE THE TOXINS).