

Harmful Algal Blooms in Ohio Waters

What is this stuff?

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are not algae at all. They're actually made up of cyanobacteria, also called "blue-green algae," and many species can generate toxins that impact people.



Lyngbya bloom on Maumee Bay near Toledo.

Photo by Dr. Tom Padgugan, University of Toledo Lake Erie Center



Cladophora is a true algae that can create large blooms but does not generate toxins.

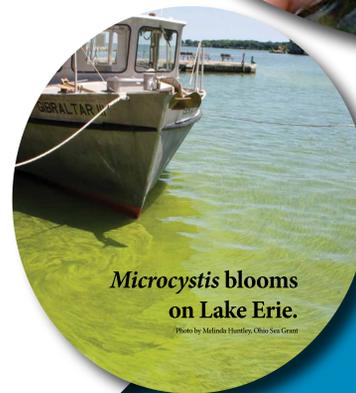
Photo by Sarah Mallin, University of Waterloo

Not all algal blooms or surface scums are HABs!



Duckweeds are small aquatic plants and do not cause HABs.

Photo by Mick MacEachern, Ohio EPA



Microcystis blooms on Lake Erie.

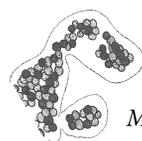
Photo by Melissa Horvath, Ohio Sea Grant

So, what's the problem?

HABs can:

- Cause taste and odor problems in drinking water
- Pollute beaches with scums
- Reduce oxygen levels for fish and other animals
- Cause processing problems for public water supplies
- Generate toxic chemicals

Common cyanobacteria that make up HABs in Ohio and Lake Erie:



Microcystis



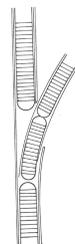
Cylindrospermopsis



Anabaena



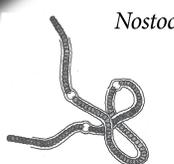
Aphanizomenon



Lyngbya



Planktothrix



Nostoc



Watch for posted HABs warnings!

Photo by Linda Mackland-Mason, Ohio EPA

What can I do about it?

How do I keep my family and pets safe?

- Avoid contact with waters that have HAB advisories posted
- Never drink lake or river water
- Never cook with natural water from areas suspected to have a HAB
- Know the signs of HAB poisoning
- Seek medical or veterinary attention immediately if swimmers or pets appear ill!

How can I help prevent HABs and toxin release?

- Limit nutrient runoff from lawns and gardens
- Maintain native plants along the shoreline of streams and ponds wherever possible
- Regularly check and maintain septic systems
- Do not treat established HABs with algaecide; toxins can be released from dying cells
- Install bottom aeration in small lakes and ponds that are at risk for HABs

How can I report a HAB?

- Ohio Department of Health
- Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Division of Surface Water
- Call your local OSU Extension watershed coordinator



Microcystis on the Ohio River near Cincinnati.

Photo by Jim Crawford, Ohio EPA