

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE (CYANOBACTERIA)

Cyanobacteria is the scientific name for blue-green algae. It is most commonly found in shallow, warm, and slow-moving or still water such as freshwater ponds and wetlands. While some species are blue-green, it can vary in colour from olive and dark green to purple and even yellowish. Cyanobacteria is of concern because it can produce toxins under certain conditions. Cyanobacteria blooms are common in other parts of Canada.

Blue-Green Algae Blooms

When large masses of Cyanobacteria form, it is known as a bloom. Cyanobacteria blooms are described as giving the water the appearance of thick pea soup.

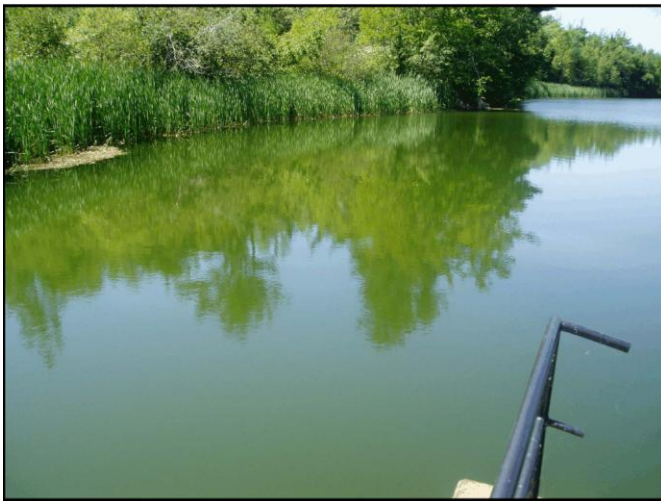


Figure 1

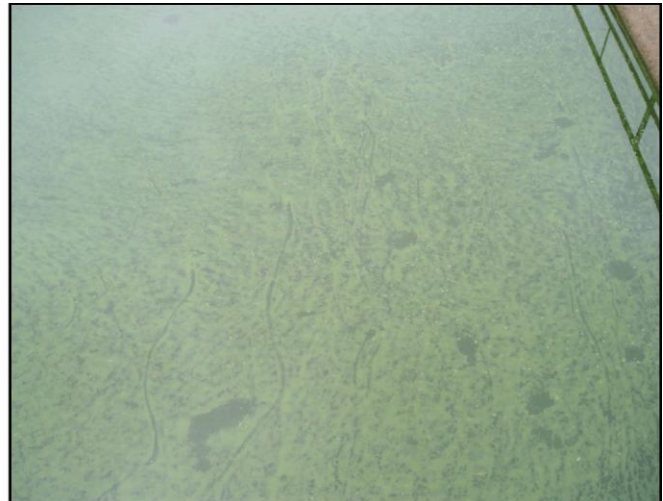


Figure 2

Figure 1 and 2: Blue-green algae bloom in MacLures Pond, Murray River. July 2005. The close-up to the right shows the grainy appearance of the bloom.



Figure 3

Figure 3: Blue-green algae bloom at MacLures Pond, August 2005. Note the scum forming at the edge of pond.

Potential Animal and Human Health Impacts

Blue-green algae blooms may form a scum on the surface of freshwater ponds and lakes and can cause skin rashes and irritation of the eyes of swimmers. Humans that inadvertently drink the water while swimming can experience nausea, vomiting, sore throat, diarrhea, or cramps. Livestock, pets, terrestrial wildlife and aquatic life can also be harmed.

Because blue-green algae blooms can produce toxins, it is wise to treat them with caution. When a heavy growth of algae is identified, the Department of Health and Wellness may post the pond as a precaution advising the public to avoid swimming or eating fish from the water and to keep animals from drinking the water.

The only way to confirm whether a particular algae bloom is toxic is through laboratory analysis. If the analysis confirms the bloom to be toxic, the Province's Chief Health Officer may issue a public advisory.

Monitoring for Blue-green Algae

The PEI Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry monitors Island ponds for the presence of blue-green algae blooms.

If you see what you suspect is a blue-green algae bloom, call the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry at (902) 368-5000.

Closed for Swimming and Angling

Attention: Heavy Blue-Green Algae Bloom



Please be advised that due to a blue-green algae bloom, this area is closed for swimming and angling. Pet owners are also advised to keep their animals from drinking this water.

Dr. Larnont Sweet
Chief Health Officer
PEI Department of Health

For further details contact:
Environmental Health
PEI Department of Health
Tel: (902) 368-4970

or
PEI Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry
Tel: (902) 368-5000

