

## How can I protect my dog from cyanobacteria?

Algal toxins can be deadly for dogs. To be on the safe side, keep your dog away from water with blue-green algae and stop it from eating any algal material from the water or on the banks.

Dogs can eat mats of benthic cyanobacteria directly from the water, or they can pick up dry mats from the river banks where they may not appear black or dark green/brown, but nevertheless are still dangerous if eaten.

These mats usually look beige/white/grey and can also look like dried tissue paper after a few days in the sun.

In lakes with planktonic cyanobacteria, dogs can swim through scums, which then irritate the skin, which the dog responds to by licking itself clean, thereby ingesting the toxins.

If you suspect your dog has eaten algae, you should treat it as an emergency and contact your veterinarian immediately.

## What should I do if I see a cyanobacteria bloom?

If you see anything that you think could be a cyanobacteria bloom, call the ORC Pollution Hotline on:

**0800 800 033** (answered 7 days a week) or fill in the incident reporting form on our website [www.orc.govt.nz](http://www.orc.govt.nz)

## A guide to **TOXIC ALGAE IN OTAGO WATERWAYS**



## What are cyanobacteria?

Cyanobacteria are a group of bacteria that are sometimes called blue-green algae.

They are widespread in lakes and rivers in New Zealand and are found across a range of water quality, including waters with very good water quality.

There are two main types of cyanobacteria – *benthic* and *planktonic*.

## What do they look like?



**Benthic cyanobacteria** form mats attached to the stream or lake bed but may detach from the bed and drift downstream, accumulating at the water's edge. Benthic cyanobacteria mats appear as dark green/brown or black growths.

**Planktonic cyanobacteria** grow in the water, especially in lakes, and can form thick scums on the water surface under the right conditions. They can give the lake a vivid green colour, appearing like 'pea soup', but can also form films or scums on the surface of the water.



## Are they toxic?

Yes, under certain conditions. Some cyanobacteria species produce natural toxins, which can be a risk to human and/or animal health if water is drunk, through contact with water, or if dogs eat algal mats.

However, not all species produce toxins and those that can produce toxins aren't always toxic. The presence of toxins is confirmed by laboratory testing. If you are unsure whether cyanobacteria are toxic or not, it is safest to assume they are.

## Can I swim, fish, or sail during a toxic cyanobacteria bloom?

Avoid swimming, even with a wetsuit, as it will not protect you – you may get severe skin irritation around the collar and cuffs.

Avoid skin contact with the water and don't swallow it – especially water that is bright green or where surface scums or films are present.

Fishing and sailing should be safe.

## Is it safe to eat fish from water with a toxic cyanobacteria bloom?

Any fish caught from waters with toxic cyanobacteria should be consumed in moderation (less than one meal per week), and you should avoid eating the liver of the fish, as toxins may accumulate there. Fish caught in waters with abundant cyanobacteria are likely to have a muddy/earthy taste.