



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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County Health Department to Monitor Harmful Algal Blooms in Area Lakes

MAYVILLE, NY - The Chautauqua County Health Department has developed a response plan to help protect the public from health affects caused by blue-green algal blooms when they occur. The algae of concern are a type of cyanobacteria that can release a toxin, which at high levels is harmful to human and animal health if ingested. It often forms thick mats on the water surface that resembles paint, and can range in color from gray to various shades of yellow, green or blue. This is a problem throughout New York and many other states and proved to be quite a nuisance on Chautauqua Lake last year.

As part of a state-wide cyanobacteria monitoring effort by the New York State Health Department, fourteen samples were collected from Chautauqua Lake between August and October 2009. Sample results indicate that open water areas of the lake contained low levels of toxin, but four samples collected from shoreline areas where significant blooms were occurring contained high levels.

Christine Schuyler, County Public Health Director, emphasized that "the real threat to public health from cyanobacteria is when people or pets drink water directly from a lake where a bloom is occurring. Lake water that is properly treated through an approved Health Department water treatment plant does not pose a risk." Schuyler went on to say that "swimming or recreating in areas where the water contains high levels of toxin does not pose a serious risk to public health, but it can cause skin irritation and other symptoms."

To prevent health related problems associated with cyanobacteria algal blooms, the Health Department recommends taking the following precautions:

- Do not drink any water unless it has been properly treated or is from a known safe source.
- Avoid or limit exposure to water where these algal blooms are occurring. This especially includes swimming and other contact recreation where the water could be accidentally swallowed.
- Do not allow young children or pets to play in water where an algal bloom is present.
- Wash your hands and body thoroughly if exposed to algal blooms and anytime after swimming or recreating in the lake.

The Health Department is closely monitoring swimming beaches throughout the county for signs of blue-green algal blooms and will be collecting a limited number of samples for submission to the New York Sate Health Department laboratory, however sample results will likely not be available until 2011. To assist the Health Department in tracking this problem, the public can 1-866-604-6789 to report the location of significant blooms.

Some algal blooms have already begun to form, but they have not been of the blue-green algae variety. These generally occur later in the summer, and have also been seen on Bear, Cassadaga and Findley lakes. Blooms tend to accumulate in calm water areas such as canals and embayments or where lake currents and wind concentrate the algae. There are no mechanical or chemical methods to eliminate a

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bloom. This problem can only be solved by reducing nutrients washing into the lake from the watershed, which act as fertilizer for both algae and weeds. A watershed management plan is currently being finalized for Chautauqua Lake to address the nutrient problem, and as recommendations in the plan are implemented, improved water quality will follow.

For more information about blue-green algae, please go to the Health Department website at <http://www.co.chautauqua.ny.us> and click on "Departments and Agencies" and then on "Health." For more information about the watershed planning process, please go to the Planning Department website at <http://www.planningchautauqua.com> and click on "Watershed Management."

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