

Does your dog swim in rivers or lakes?

Toxic cyanobacteria can kill animals. Know what to look for.

Risk to animals:

Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) can make animals extremely sick, sometimes causing death.

Dogs are particularly at risk if they swallow the algae or algal mats when swimming and drinking from rivers and lakes.

Symptoms of cyanotoxin poisoning in dogs include panting, lethargy, muscle tremors, twitching and convulsions. These symptoms usually occur within 30 minutes.

When to avoid water contact:

Avoid all human and animal contact with water that is:

- Cloudy
- Discoloured
- Musty smelling

Or if it has:

- Small globules suspended in it
- Coloured scum forming
- Thick dark brown or black mats on the bed of the river, with a slimy/velvety texture

Need to know:

- Cyanobacteria occur naturally all year round, but are more common during the warmer months
- Not all cyanobacterial blooms are visible, and toxins can persist after visible blooms disappear
- Cyanobacteria concentrations can change quickly, such as on windy days
- Environment Canterbury monitors popular freshwater recreation sites in Canterbury during summer, and health warnings are placed at affected spots.

Not sure? Don't risk it:

Warnings will not be in place at all spots where animals could enter the water. It is important to know how to identify cyanobacteria mats and prevent your animals from coming into contact with them.



River cyanobacteria



Lake cyanobacteria

Identifying cyanobacteria:

Rivers

If the bed of a river is covered in thick dark brown or black mats that have a slimy/velvety texture and earthy/musty smell, it is better to be cautious and totally avoid that river site.



Lakes

If the water of a lake is cloudy, discoloured, or has small globules suspended in it, it is better to be cautious and totally avoid that lake or bay.



What causes cyanobacteria blooms?

The formation of mats or blooms of cyanobacteria is linked with changes in environmental conditions. These include a combination of warm temperatures, sunlight, low or stable river flows and nutrients.

Cyanobacteria are sometimes called blue-green algae.

What risks do cyanobacteria pose to animals?

Dogs are particularly susceptible to poisoning from both mat-forming and free-floating/suspended cyanobacteria as they enjoy being in the water and may consume these algae intentionally or by accident.

Livestock are also at risk from cyanotoxin poisoning and should be provided with alternative drinking water sources.

Symptoms of cyanotoxin poisoning in animals include lethargy, muscle tremors, fast breathing, twitching, paralysis and convulsions. In extreme cases, death can occur 30 minutes after symptoms first appear.

If you are concerned, contact a veterinarian immediately. You or your vet can report any animal illness resulting from contact with cyanobacteria to Environment Canterbury.

What are the health risks to humans from toxin-producing cyanobacteria?

People having contact with water containing cyanotoxins have been known to develop reactions. These include asthma, eye irritations, rashes, blistering around the mouth and nose and gastrointestinal disorders such as abdominal pain, cramps and diarrhoea.

Any reaction depends on the type of cyanobacteria and cyanotoxins present, and their concentrations in the water.

If you think you have experienced a reaction, see your doctor and tell them that you think you have been exposed to potentially toxic cyanobacteria.