



TOI TE ORA
PUBLIC HEALTH
Bay of Plenty • Lakes Districts



LAKE TAUPŌ ALGAE BLOOMS

Frequently asked questions

Current at: 6.30pm, 15 December 2017

Health warnings due to potentially toxin-producing algal blooms have been lifted for Lake Taupō. However, due to the forecast hot, dry summer, people are encouraged to be vigilant and look for signs of algae before they leap into the water to cool off.

WHO TO CONTACT

Waikato Regional Council: 0800 800 401

- To report any signs of algal blooms.

Taupō District Council: 0800 ASK TDC

- For advice on drinking water and beach access.

Healthline: 0800 611 116

- For advice from trained registered nurses.

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE

What risk can algal blooms pose to me?

Contact with algal mats can cause skin rashes, stomach upsets and respiratory symptoms such as triggering of asthmatic attacks. If material from algal mats is swallowed it can cause neurological symptoms such as numbness and weakness, visual symptoms and, in severe cases, affect the ability to breathe.

What should I do if I've already been swimming in algae affected places?

If you are concerned about your health, speak to your GP or medical professional, or call Healthline on 0800 611 116.

Can algae affect animals?

Yes. The algae that form algal mats can release toxins that are potentially harmful to people and animals, particularly dogs. So please keep pets and livestock out of algae-affected water.

How can I stay up to date with health warnings?

For Toi Te Ora – Health Warnings are listed at the below channels and will be removed when no longer in place.

- www.toiteora.govt.nz/health_warnings

- www.toiteora.govt.nz/news_and_events
- www.facebook.com/toiteora
- www.twitter.com/toiteora
- 0800 221 555 (press 2 for health warnings in Lakes region)

Are the drinking supplies safe?

Taupō District Council has comprehensive monitoring in place to ensure the quality and safety of ALL drinking water at ALL times. Water supply intakes will continue to be monitored as part of the annual summer testing programme. Private water supplies can also be reinstated now the warning has been lifted.

Can I go swimming?

With a dry, hot summer predicted, conditions are right for ongoing algae bloom outbreaks. People should remain vigilant and look before they leap into the water over summer. If the water looks discoloured, smells unusual, or if there is scum on the surface, swim or play somewhere else.

ALGAL BLOOMS

More information can be found at www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/algalblossoms.

What causes algae blooms?

Algae occur naturally in our rivers, lakes and streams, flourishing during hot and calm conditions. Most algae present in waterways are harmless, but high levels of blue-green algae blooms may be potentially toxic and a risk to the health of people and animals.

What type of algae were they? What do they look like?

They were extensive green to brown/black-coloured mats that settled on rocks and the lake floor. Significant clumps sometimes break off and float free, collecting on the water's edge. The algae that form algal mats can release toxins that are potentially harmful to people and animals.



What is the likelihood of algal blooms returning over summer?

While algal blooms occur naturally in hot and calm conditions, they also depend on other factors such as the amount of available plant nutrients, phosphorus and nitrogen within a lake. With a dry, hot summer predicted, conditions are right for ongoing algal bloom outbreaks. People should remain vigilant and look before they leap into the water over summer. If the water looks discoloured, smells unusual, or if there is scum on the surface, swim or play somewhere else.

What happens to the algae when it dies? Is this when it releases toxins?

Algae are naturally occurring and there are different species, many of which are harmless. There are some which release toxins, whether they are alive or dead; however, it cannot be predicted when this will occur. Because of this changeable natural process, people should avoid touching the algal blooms.

What do I do if I see algal blooms?

Call Waikato Regional Council on 0800 800 401. Staff are on standby over the Christmas-New Year period to respond to any reports from the public of algal blooms in our region's waterways.

MONITORING**Now the health warning has been lifted, how often will sampling be carried out?**

During the summer, Waikato Regional Council sampling is carried out for E.coli once a week. Our environmental monitoring team will be carrying out visual inspections of the lake's 12 bathing beaches while samples are being collected. Algal sampling and testing for Lake Taupō is only carried out when there is a bloom.

What should I do if I see algae washed up on the shoreline?

Leave it alone. It's actually an important part of the ecology of the lake and is okay to be left on the shoreline.

Is there anything we can do to stop it from coming back?

The warm weather is set to continue, which means the algal blooms might return – and we may experience blooms in other waterways in our region too. However, there continues to be extensive work being carried out by landowners and others in the Lake Taupō catchment to mitigate the impact of their activities on the water quality. As well, Waikato Regional Council has a monitoring programme in place for the summer.

MORE INFORMATION

www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/lake-taupo-algal-blooms