

Keep Your Pet Safe From Harmful Algal Blooms in Florida

What are algal blooms?

Algal blooms occur when algae, which are usually found in water, multiply very quickly. In Florida, algal blooms can be found in our fresh water, salt water and brackish water bodies. Algal blooms are temporary and can occur at any time but tend to occur most commonly in Florida in late summer and early fall.

An algal bloom may have the following features:

- Discoloration of the water such as green, blue, brown or red
- Look like foam, scum, mats or paint on the surface of the water
- Smell bad
- Have dead fish in or around the water

What are harmful algal blooms?

Harmful algal blooms occur when there is rapid growth of certain types of algae which can cause harm to people, animals or the local environment. The harmful algal blooms of most concern to human and animal health are those that produce toxins. It is not possible to tell if there are toxins associated with the bloom just by looking at it.

In fresh water such as lakes and rivers, the most common harmful algal blooms are caused by cyanobacteria, sometimes called blue-green algae. In salt water, an example of a harmful algal bloom is red tide that may be found in the Gulf of Mexico.

Why are harmful algal blooms important to my pet's health?

Toxins can be produced by harmful algal blooms which can cause serious illness and death in animals. Illness and death in Florida dogs have been linked to exposure to harmful algal blooms.

How can my pet get sick from harmful algal blooms?

Dogs can be exposed by swimming in or drinking water that contains harmful algal bloom toxins. Some dogs may also be attracted to the smell and taste of algae. They may eat scum, foam or dead fish in or around the water that contains toxins. In addition, dogs may also lick algae off their fur after swimming.

What symptoms might my pet have?

Symptoms in dogs normally occur within a few minutes to days of exposure to toxins from harmful algal blooms. Symptoms in dogs can include:

- Lack of energy
- Not eating
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Yellow eyes or gums
- Bruising
- Dark urine
- Weakness, stumbling
- Tremors, seizures
- Difficulty breathing
- Excessive drooling

What should I do if I suspect my pet has been exposed to harmful algal blooms?

If your dog swam in an algal bloom, wash your dog off with clean water immediately. If your dog drank any water with an algal bloom or has eaten any material near the algal bloom, please call a veterinarian immediately, especially if they are showing any signs of illness. You may also call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at 1-888-426-4435 or the Pet Poison Helpline at 1-855-764-7661 if you have questions about your pet (there is a fee for these calls).

How should I prevent my pet from getting sick from harmful algal blooms?

If you see signs of an algal bloom as described above:

- Keep your dog on a leash and away from the water.
- Do not let your dog wade or swim in the water.
- Do not let your dog drink the water or eat any material (e.g. dead fish, scum) nearby.
- Do not let your dog lick their fur until they have been bathed if they have been in contact with an algal bloom.

If there is health signage present, follow the signs to keep your dog safe.

Remember, you cannot tell if a bloom is toxic just by looking at it. If in doubt, keep out!

Learn more about harmful algal blooms at [FloridaHealth.gov/environmental-health/aquatic-toxins](https://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/aquatic-toxins)