

What can I do about it?

Algae need nutrients—like phosphorous and nitrogen—to grow. These nutrients are found in animal and human waste (sewage) and fertilizers. Here's what you can do to prevent toxic algae:

1. Eliminate or reduce use of fertilizers.
2. Properly use and maintain your septic system. Have your system inspected every one to three years and pumped as needed. For more information, visit www.tpchd.org/septic.
3. Keep animal waste out of streams or lakes! Pick up after your pets, don't feed waterfowl, and keep livestock away from the water.
4. Plant native plants between your yard and the creek or lake to reduce runoff and prevent erosion.

Find out more!

- Ecology's Fresh Water Algae Control Program: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/plants/algae/
- Human health and toxic blooms: www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/algae
- Local advisories concerning toxic blooms: www.tpchd.org/surfacewater
- Find out how to keep water clean at www.piercecountywa.org/pssh

Get surface water and shellfish advisories by email!

Go to www.tpchd.org, to sign up for Public Health eNews, check the lake advisories subject box and fill in your contact information.



Scan the QR code below to get current surface water advisories on your smart phone or call (253) 798-6470.



Toxic Algae



*Information for Pierce County Residents and Visitors—
What you need to know to
protect your health, and your
environment.*

What are toxic algae?



Toxic algae (also known as Cyanobacteria) are naturally occurring organisms that can create powerful poisons—also called toxins.

Weather conditions, fertilizers and waste, and other causes can lead to rapid algae growth and toxic algae blooms.

We have found toxic algae blooms in many lakes, ponds and creeks in Pierce County—including American, Bay, Clear, Harts, Louise, Ohop, Silver, Spanaway, Steilacoom, Tanwax, Tule, Waughop and Whitman Lakes, as well as Chambers, Mayo and Ohop Creeks.

When visible, toxic algae look like tiny green, blue-green, brown or red specks. Blooms often form a scum that looks like green paint or pea soup. Algae tend to move with the wind, building up on the edge of the shore.

Toxic algae are tiny—much smaller than aquatic plants. The only way to tell if the algae are toxic is through laboratory testing.

What are the health concerns?

There are several kinds of toxic algae that can produce a number of different toxins. Some toxins harm the nervous system and others harm the liver. In general, the more toxic algae present, the greater the potential health concern.

Children and pets are at greatest risk—you should seek medical attention immediately if they have swallowed water with algae.

Swallowing water with algae or having prolonged skin contact with algae may result in muscle weakness, vomiting, diarrhea or nausea. For pets and other small animals, exposure can result in death.

Other symptoms may include irritation to skin, eyes, nose and throat.

When in doubt, stay out!



What should I do if I see an algae bloom?

- Keep children and pets away from areas with visible algae.
- Do not swim, wade, fish, or water ski in areas with visible algae.
- If the area is open to the public and isn't already posted with a Health Department sign, please call us at (253) 798-6470.



Can I eat fish from toxic algae contaminated water?

Avoid eating fish from areas with visible algae. Always clean fish well and discard guts.