



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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County Health Department Urges Lake Users To Be Cautious

MAYVILLE, NY – The mild winter and higher than normal temperatures has made summer bloom early throughout the region, unfortunately this includes an early bloom of nuisance aquatic weeds and algae in our lakes. The Chautauqua County Health Department urges all residents to be cautious when recreating in our area lakes, especially if weeds or algae are present. Weeds can restrict swimmer's movements that can be dangerous, especially for beginner swimmers and children. Blue-green algal blooms can be a problem because they can release a toxin, which at high levels is harmful to human and animal health if ingested.

Blue-green algae is actually a type of cyanobacteria that can form thick mats on the water surface resembling paint, and can range in color from gray to various shades of yellow, green, blue or brown. This is a problem throughout New York and many other states and proved to be quite significant on Chautauqua Lake in recent years. It has also been a problem on our other inland lakes, especially Findley Lake.

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. 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." Schuyler added, "A significant amount of sampling and testing for microcystin, one of the most common toxins produced by cyanobacteria, has been done on Chautauqua and Findley lakes over the past three years. The only samples that have been high were those from locations where significant blooms were present and the water was very unsightly."

The Health Department has developed a response plan to help protect the public from potential health effects caused by blue-green algal blooms when they occur. This includes closely monitoring permitted bathing beaches and public drinking water supplies, along with collecting a limited number of samples from our lakes for submission to the New York State Health Department laboratory.

Not all algal blooms are hazardous, but the Health Department recommends taking the following precautions:

- 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.
- Do not use any water from lakes for drinking unless it has been treated through a municipal water treatment plant.
- Do not enter the water if you have open cuts or sores.

There are no mechanical or chemical methods to eliminate a 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. Watershed management plans have been developed for several lakes including Chautauqua and Findley to address the nutrient problem. As recommendations in the plan are implemented, improved water quality will follow, but it will take years to see improvements.

For more information about blue-green algae, please go to the Health Department website, www.myhealthycounty.com. For more information about the watershed planning process, please go to the Planning Department website, <http://www.planningchautauqua.com> and click on "Watershed Management."

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