

# HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

## How to Identify Harmful Algal Blooms in Freshwater

Algae, or one-celled plants, are normally found in fresh bodies of water and can grow rapidly when environmental conditions are favorable, including warm temperatures, calm water and a lot of nutrients in the water. This rapid growth of algae is called a bloom.

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are blue-green algae that can produce a toxin, or poison, that can make humans and animals sick. HABs can have many colors and appear in different forms, making it difficult to tell a harmful algal bloom from non-harmful normal algae. Non-harmful, or green algae, do not produce toxins and are not harmful to human health. Here are some quick ways to distinguish a harmful algal bloom from normal, non-harmful algae:

### Harmful algal blooms:

- Occur near the shore
- Are evenly dispersed in the water
- Can be many colors including green, white, tan, blue, purple or brown
- Not seeing a harmful algal bloom in the water does not completely rule out exposure



Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR



Photo credit: Indiana DNR

## HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS IN THE WATER

**Can look like pea soup or spilled paint that has streaks of color.**

Some blooms grow below the water's surface or along the waterbed. Pieces of these mats can break off and float to the surface.



Photo credit: Indiana DNR



Photo credit: Matt Meade – Wisconsin DNR

## HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS ON THE SHORE

**Can look like dried mats or scum.**

During decay, HABs can change color by releasing blue pigment. These algae are harmful both in and out of the water.

## NON-HARMFUL ALGAE

**Non-harmful algae can look like long, hair-like branches or wet cotton that is only green in color.**



Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR



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## AQUATIC PLANTS

**Normal water plants can look like algae but are not. Some of these include:**

- Duckweeds
- Milfoil
- Watermeal

**Pollen can blow on to the surface of water and can look like algae.**



Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR



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For more information, please see the HABs webpage:

<http://www.state.in.us/25974.htm>



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