



"Screen For Green" Diagnosing Harmful Algal Bloom Illness

[Quick Factsheet for Physicians]

What are Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)?

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) contain toxins produced by cyanobacteria. They occur in lakes, ponds, rivers and streams. These toxins can damage the liver, kidneys, GI tract and nervous system. To complicate the picture, algal blooms (or cyanobacteria) may:

- Not be visible on the surface
- Be present at any water depth
- Not produce toxins

State Agencies, such as Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), regularly sample certain public bodies of water for HAB toxins across the state. These results are publicly available on [ODH's Beachguard website](#) or the state of [Ohio algae website](#).

Below are the most common algal toxins and their associated symptoms:

Toxin	Symptoms
Microcystins	Diarrhea, vomiting, weakness
Cylindrospermopsin	Gastroenteritis (kidney and liver failure are rare)
Anatoxin	Muscle twitching, cramping, salivation
Saxitoxin	Headache, vertigo, parasthesias

Think about Harmful Algal Bloom poisoning if

- A patient has developed any symptoms described in the table above within 24 hours of recreation or contact with a surface water

[Click here for treatment algorithm flowchart](#)

Testing: There are currently no reliable tests to look for HAB toxins. If you suspect a patient has ingested a HAB toxin, consider ordering liver function tests along with BUN/Creatinine as these can be elevated in significant HAB ingestions.

- **Treatment:** Treatment for HAB's is largely supportive. Individuals with severe symptoms will likely need hospital based care.
- **Prevention:** Check the [Beachguard website](#) prior to recreating and avoid areas where toxins are known or suspected. Pay attention to warning signs.
- Use the following ICD-10 code to document initial HAB Exposure:
 - **T65.821A:** Toxic effect of harmful algae and algae toxins, accidental (unintentional), initial encounter
- **Report:** If you suspect a HAB related illness, contact the Local Health District Epidemiologist or the Ohio Department of Health. [Click here to find contact information for your local health department.](#)

For more detailed information, see the [HAB Detailed Physician Reference](#).

Who can I contact for more information?

Ohio Department of Health
Bureau of Environmental Health and Radiation Protection
246 N. High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone: (614) 466-1390

Helpful Links:

- [ODH Harmful Algal Bloom Website](#)
- [ODH Beachguard website](#)
- [State of Ohio HAB website](#)
- [Human Illness Reporting Form – Public Water Supply](#)
- [Human Illness Reporting Form - Recreational](#)
- [Local Health District Contacts](#)
- [CDC HAB Information](#)
- [US EPA HAB Information](#)