

Blue-green algae

Blue-green algae are natural inhabitants of many inland waters, estuaries and the sea.

Heavy growths of blue-green algae are naturally encouraged by warm water temperatures and stable, sunny conditions particularly if the water is enriched with nutrients. In some years, the numbers of blue-green algae in a reservoir may become excessive. Such extensive growths are sometimes referred to as "blooms".

What do algae blooms look like?

The water may be discoloured green, blue-green or greenish brown and several species can produce musty, earthy or grassy odours. Heavy growths sometimes cause foaming on the shore-line.

During calm weather several species of blue-green algae can rise to the surface to form a scum which may be blue-green, grey-green, greenish brown or occasionally reddish-brown.

Are blue-green algae harmful?

Research has shown that around half of all blooms of blue-green algae produce toxins. These can be harmful if swallowed in significant quantities.

Although algal scum is not always harmful, it is a sensible precaution to avoid contact with the scum and the water close to it. Caution should be taken with animals because they have been known to eat or swallow large quantities of algal scum which has resulted in the deaths of some animals. Farmers and pet owners should ensure that their animals do not have access to affected water.

Contact with heavy blooms of blue-green algae can also cause skin rashes

Do blue-green algae affect the quality of drinking water?

There is no evidence to show that blue-green algae toxins occur in drinking water at harmful levels.

Modern water treatment processes used to treat surface waters in the UK can remove or destroy any blue-green toxins that might be present in the untreated water.

What is Dŵr Cymru doing about algal blooms?

We regularly monitor our reservoirs for algal blooms. To discourage the growth of blue-green algae in specific reservoirs, barley straw is added to the water which is an environmentally friendly reservoir management technique.

If blue-green algae blooms are present, warning signs are put up around the reservoir asking people to stay away from the water and to keep their animals from coming into contact with it.

What can you do?

Read and follow the advice on blue-green algae signs displayed at reservoirs.

If a bloom is present at a reservoir, keep away from the water and any scum that has accumulated at the edge or on the shore.

Keep your pets or livestock away from the reservoir.

If you pursue activities such as sailing, avoid contact with and swallowing the water. Wear protective clothing and shower afterwards.

Do not carry out immersion sports such as swimming, canoeing and sail boarding in reservoirs affected by blue-green algae blooms.

Where can I get further information?

Please call us first on our operational helpline on **0800 052 0130**.

One of our regulators, the Drinking Water Inspectorate, is responsible for ensuring the high quality of public water supplies. You can visit their website at: www.dwi.gov.uk

The Environment Agency has a 24 hour freephone hotline for environmental incidents on: **0800 80 70 60**