

What is Blue-green algae (BGA)?

Blue-green algae, also known as Cyanobacteria, are microscopic organisms that live in water. The algae are usually too small to be seen, but sometimes can form visible algae blooms. BGA blooms can form in warm, slow-moving waters that are rich in nutrients. Blooms usually occur in late summer or early fall. BGA can produce toxins that may contaminate drinking or recreational water.

Where can BGA be found?

BGA can be found in any body of water, such as, lakes, ponds, creeks, ocean, brackish water etc.

What does a BGA bloom look like?

BGA blooms can look like foam, scum, or mats on the surface of water. The blooms can be blue, bright green, brown, or red. Some blooms may not affect the appearance of the water. As algae in the BGA blooms die, the water may have an unpleasant odor.

How are people exposed to BGA?

A person can be exposed to BGA by drinking contaminated water, participating in recreational activities in contaminated water, inhaling aerosolized water contaminated with BGA, or using BGA-based dietary supplements that are contaminated with microcystins.

What symptoms could you develop after exposure to BGA?

- Skin Exposure: rash, hives, or skin blisters.
- Inhalation: runny eyes, runny nose, sore throat, asthma like symptoms, or allergic reactions
- Ingestion:
 - Acute, severe gastroenteritis (stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhea or vomiting);
 - Liver toxicity (abdominal pain, diarrhea, or vomiting)
 - This also includes increased serum levels of liver enzymes.
 - Kidney toxicity
 - Neurotoxicity
 - Humans: Numb lips, tingling fingers or toes, or dizziness
 - Dogs: Salivation, weakness, staggering, difficulty breathing, convulsions, and death

How soon can symptoms develop after exposure?

It is unknown how soon symptoms develop after exposure to BGA. However, it may take hours or days for liver toxicity to show up in humans or animals, and neurotoxicity symptoms may appear within 15 to 20 minutes after exposure.

How do you prevent exposure to BGA?

Do not swim or participate in water recreational activities where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum, or mats of algae on the water. Do not irrigate lawns or golf courses with pond water that appears scummy or has a bad odor. Report any musty smell or taste in your drinking water to your local water utility. Respect any water body closures announced by local water regulatory authorities.

What should you do if you think you have been exposed to BGA?

If you swam in water that might have BGA toxins rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible. If you develop any symptoms seek medical attention immediately and inform your healthcare provider of your recent exposure.

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What treatment is recommended for BGA toxin poisoning?

There is no treatment for individuals exposed to toxins associated with cyanobacteria. Supportive care is the only recommended treatment.

How do you test humans for BGA toxins?

No standard, licensed tests are available to test for BGA toxins.

