



# BEAR CREEK WATERSHED

## Fact Sheet 66 Blue-Green Algae (Cyanobacteria) and Pets September 2019

The Bear Creek Watershed Association protects and restores water and environmental quality within the Bear Creek Watershed from the effects of land use.

### Membership

Clear Creek County  
Jefferson County  
City of Lakewood  
Town of Morrison  
Aspen Park Metropolitan District  
Conifer Sanitation Association  
Denver Water Department  
Evergreen Metropolitan District  
Forest Hills Metropolitan District  
Genesee Sanitation & Water District  
Geneva Glen  
Jefferson County School District  
Kittredge Water & Sanitation District  
West Jefferson County Metro District

Common Signs of blue-green or Cyanobacterial Poisoning in dogs or household pets

### Liver Toxins

- repeated vomiting (green liquid)
- diarrhea or bloody stool
- loss of appetite or anorexia
- jaundice (yellowing of eye whites or gums)
- abdominal swelling; may be tender to the touch
- bluish coloration of skin
- dark urine or reduced/no urine output

### Nerve Toxins

- convulsions, paralysis
- excessive salivation/drooling
- disorientation, inactivity or depression
- elevated heart rate
- difficulty breathing

### Skin Toxins

- skin rashes
- hives

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) may pose a significant threat to pets, waterfowl and livestock. HABs in Colorado have increased in frequency, duration, and distribution in recent decades in various ponds, lakes and reservoirs. The toxins in some cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) have negatively impacted waters throughout the urban areas in Colorado. Of the 8,000 or so species of cyanobacteria, only about 40 produce toxins and only six are common in Colorado. However, these toxins can poison household pets, waterfowl and livestock. Dog poisonings from cyanobacterial toxins is on the rise.

Animals are not hesitant about swimming in or ingesting water with algal blooms. They are exposed to HAB toxins by primary contact resulting in skin irritation, and most importantly by ingesting HAB infested waters; eating blue-green algae on the beach; or licking fur when self grooming after swimming. Since dogs have a smaller body mass, they are likely to experience more adverse illness and even death at lower algal toxin levels.

Signs toxin exposure can occur within 30 minutes to a few hours after exposure, depending on the size of the dog, the type of toxin, the toxin concentration and how much toxin the dog has ingested. In severe cases, dogs can show signs of cyanobacterial poisoning within a few minutes and can die within an hour of toxin exposure. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, difficulty breathing, or seizures.

If you suspect your dog has been exposed to cyanobacterial toxins, seek immediate veterinary care. You can also contact various pet poison hotlines for more information. Untreated, cyanobacterial poisonings can be fatal in dogs. Veterinary care can last a few days to several weeks.

See BCWA *Fact Sheet 57 Cyanotoxins* and BCWA *Fact Sheet 58 Cyanobacteria Guide BCR* for more information on HABs. Human health risks are summarized in BCWA *Fact Sheet 61 HABs Exposure and Risks*. Cyanobacteria get their name from their blue-green pigment but blooms can often look green, blue-green, green-brown, or red. Cyanobacteria blooms can have a distinctive smell, sometimes described as gasoline, septic or fishy.

Report suspected pet problems to your local governments: Jefferson county, Clear Creek County, City of Lakewood, Town of Morrison, Evergreen Metro District, Jefferson County Health or Tri-County Health.

When a suspected harmful algal bloom is present, you can reduce the risk of dog or pet poisoning by blue-green or cyanobacterial toxins.

- Keep your dog on a leash near shorelines.
- Don't let dogs wade, drink the water or eat/walk in shoreline debris.
- If your dog goes in the water please remove them immediately.
- Don't let them lick their fur or paws after getting out of the water.
- Rinse/wash them thoroughly with fresh water from a safe source (i.e. bottled water or household garden hose).
- Otherwise a towel or rag can be used to remove algal debris.
- Protect yourself, use rubber gloves during pet cleaning.
- Dry them thoroughly with a clean towel or rag.
- Wash your hands with fresh water.
- Look closely for any symptoms.
- Please notify your veterinary service if you observe any suspected HAB symptoms.

