

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

An illustration of a boy in a yellow shirt and green shorts running towards a pond. A golden retriever is swimming in the pond, which is surrounded by green grass, rocks, and cattails. The water in the pond is discolored with green and yellow patches, representing blue-green algae blooms.

What is it?

Despite the name, blue-green algae are actually cyanobacteria—microorganisms that grow in water and produce toxins called cyanotoxins. These harmful “blooms” typically occur in warm, stagnant, nutrient-rich water.

Why do we worry?

Contaminated water can be toxic to both animals and humans. Cyanotoxins vary by type and dose, with some causing liver failure or seizures. Milder effects include skin irritation and stomach issues.

What should pet owners do?

Avoid discolored or suspicious water, and stay updated on water quality reports from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. If a pet swims in or ingests questionable water, bathe them immediately and contact a veterinarian. If possible, collect a water sample for toxin testing.

Veterinary Care

If caught early, inducing vomiting may help reduce toxin absorption. Treatment is supportive, focusing on symptom management and organ function monitoring. Unfortunately, once liver failure or neurological signs appear, the prognosis is often poor.