



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities



Contact: Melanie Collett

Health Advisories Issued for Fernan and Hayden Lakes



(Harmful algal bloom scum near the eastern boat ramp at Fernan Lake)

KOOTENAI COUNTY, ID -- Panhandle Health District (PHD) and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) have issued health advisories for the east side of Fernan Lake and the northern arm of Hayden Lake, near the Sportsman Access. PHD is urging the public to use caution when recreating in or near the water.

Water quality monitoring confirmed the presence of cyanobacteria, commonly known as blue-green algae. Blue-green algal blooms have the potential to produce dangerous toxins in areas of the lakes. Pets, children, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems are most at-risk of harmful exposure.

Blue-green algae are naturally-occurring, microscopic bacteria. Harmful algal blooms (HABs) typically occur during the warm summer months, when toxin-producing algae proliferate under certain oxygen and nutrient conditions. The physical appearance of blue-green algal blooms can be unsightly, often presenting in discolored water, streaks or globs of scum and causing thick green mats along lake shorelines.

Anyone recreating near these areas of Hayden or Fernan Lake is advised to take precautions and prevent people and pets from exposure to lake water appearing to contain blue-green algae. Property owners utilizing the lake as a drinking water source are cautioned that potentially present toxins cannot be removed by boiling or filtering the water. If contact (swimming, bathing, or showering) has been made with water containing blue-green algae, it is recommended to wash off with fresh water. Recreational contact with water that is not visibly affected by a blue-green algae bloom is not expected to cause adverse health effects.

If people choose to eat fish from this area, it is recommended that they remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking, since toxins are more likely to collect in those tissues.

Symptoms of exposure to algal toxins vary according to exposure. Symptoms include rashes, hives, diarrhea, vomiting, coughing, and/or wheezing. More severe symptoms affecting the liver and nervous system may result from ingestion of water. If symptoms persist, consult with your health care provider.

The public will be advised when the concern no longer exists. DEQ is working with residents and landowners to implement nutrient reduction projects to improve overall water quality and limit the frequency and duration of these algal blooms.

Updated information on harmful algae blooms in northern Idaho can be found online at <http://www.deq.idaho.gov/water-quality/surface-water/blue-green-algae/>.