



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH - ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH UNIT

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(Commissioner of Social Services/Public Health Director)*

## **PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT**

**Date:** July 27, 2018

**To:** Chautauqua County Health Care Providers and Veterinarians

**From:** Christine Schuyler

**Re:** Reporting Potential Illnesses Caused by Harmful Algal Blooms and Swimmer's Itch

The Chautauqua County Department of Health and Human Services (CCDHHS) is requesting your help to monitor any illness that may be related to blue-green algae (BGA) exposure. Blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, may form a surface scum or matt that can be various shades of green, blue-green, yellow, brown, or red and can develop a paint-like appearance on the water surface.

Blue-green algae are capable of producing toxins that pose a risk to human and animal health, especially when ingested. Water testing in lakes where BGA is present shows that areas where a surface matt has formed can contain the highest toxin levels. Areas where there is no surface matt but the water is green throughout the water column can also contain high toxin levels. There are no visual indications when BGA is producing toxins, therefore CCDHHS recommends people avoid any area where BGA is observed.

A dense area of BGA that is producing toxins is referred to as a Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB). Currently a HAB is present in the South Basin of Chautauqua Lake. Additional blooms may be present in other area lakes. If you treat a patient whose diagnosis may be linked to exposure from BGA, please contact the New York State Health Department on-line reporting site at [harmfulalgae@health.ny.gov](mailto:harmfulalgae@health.ny.gov) and they will follow-up. When reporting a possible exposure please include information regarding the exact location where the alleged exposure occurred so the reported area can be observed and possibly sampled as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation. Information from the CDC regarding blue-green algae is included.

A small number of cases that appear to be related to swimmer's itch, also known as cercarial dermatitis, have been reported in the South Basin of Chautauqua Lake in 2018. The parasite associated with swimmer's itch has been identified in Chautauqua Lake in the past. However, the occurrence of the parasite can vary in frequency and location such that CCDHHS has not received a report of the condition since 2012. Patients experiencing swimmer's itch should notify CCDHHS so that we may identify areas in the County where the parasite may be present. Please visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/swimmersitch/faqs.html> for frequently asked questions and resources for health professionals.