



Media Release

Caution urged after harmful algal bloom detected in Russian River in Sonoma County

Toxic algae pose serious threat to children, pets

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Sacramento – The recent detection of toxic algal mats growing on the bottom of the Russian River has prompted the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and Sonoma County health officials to advise caution for recreational water users.

These mats, much like harmful algal blooms (HABs) floating at or near the water's surface, are a threat to human health, especially children, and can be fatal to dogs playing in the water.

State Water Board staff recently conducted a field investigation in the Russian River and quickly confirmed there are toxic algal mats in the water at Riverfront Park and in Cloverdale. These mats are detaching from the riverbed and may become stranded on the banks. Those findings prompted Sonoma County to post "[Toxic Algae Alert](#)" signs at recreational areas along the river based on statewide guidance. Boaters and other recreational users are urged to be alert when in or near the water.

The Sonoma County Department of Health Services will post the latest health and safety guidance on its [website](#); the State Water Board will provide regular updates on the [California HAB Reports Web Map](#).

In the Russian River, harmful algal blooms are caused by blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, and often grow at the bottom of waterways, forming mats. If you see algal mats, avoid touching them and keep dogs from touching or eating them. Dogs should also not drink from waters with active blooms or mats.

These recommendations are based on the potential health risks posed by the toxins produced by cyanobacteria. The toxic algal mats can be found either attached to the bottom, floating on the surface or stranded on the riverbank. The appearance of algal mats ranges from bright to dull-green, orange, brown, and maroon material. When in doubt, avoid touching algal mats.



The State Water Board recommends that people practice [healthy water habits](#) while enjoying the outdoors this summer at their favorite lakes, rivers or streams:

- Heed all instructions on posted advisories if present
- Avoid algae and scum in the water and on the shore
- Keep an eye on children and pets
- If you think a harmful algal bloom or toxic algal mats are present, do not let pets and other animals go into the water or come into contact with scum/algal mats on the shore
- Don't drink the water or use it for cooking
- Wash yourself, your family and your pets with clean water after playing in the water
- If you catch fish, throw away guts and clean fillets with tap water or bottled water before cooking
- Avoid eating shellfish if you think a harmful algal bloom is present

Get medical treatment immediately if you think that you, your pets or livestock have gotten sick after going in the water. Be sure to alert a medical professional to the possible contact with cyanobacteria. Also, please contact the local county public health department.

To report a bloom, do one of the following:

- Fill out the [Bloom Report](#) form on the portal
- Email: CyanoHAB.reports@waterboards.ca.gov
- Call the HABs hotline: 1-844-729-6466 (toll free)
- Contact Sonoma County Environmental Health at (707) 565-6565

For more information about HABs, please visit:

[California Harmful Algal Blooms Portal](#)