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Toxic Algae Prompts Warnings at White Sandy Beach on Hauser

Lewis and Clark Public Health reported Tuesday that toxic, blue-green algae has been found at White Sandy Beach on the west side of Hauser Lake.

“We strongly recommend that people stay out of any water where you see blue-green algae blooms,” said Laurel Riek, environmental health specialist at the health department. “Keep children and pets out of the water to prevent illness. Protect your health by not swimming in the water. Avoid swallowing or drinking surface water.”

“Harmful algal blooms,” or HABs, contain toxins that can irritate the skin, eyes, nose, throat, and lungs and cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, or liver and kidney damage. Exposure can sometimes be fatal. Children and animals are most at risk because they spend so much time wading in shallow water where the algae tends to accumulate. They also are more likely to get the water in their mouths.

The Bureau of Land Management, which manages White Sandy Beach, has posted signs warning of the algae and its potential health impacts.

The algae in HABs are native to freshwater lakes and reservoirs in Montana. They tend to grow in warmer water and where there’s an increase in nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from a variety of human activities.

The algae blooms float on the surface of the water and look like pea soup, grass clippings, or green latex paint.

If you see what you think might be a harmful algae bloom, you can report it using the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services website at www.hab.mt.gov. The site also has a map of reported HABs and information on how to identify them.

If you suspect a HAB-related illness in a person or animal, including livestock, call Poison Control immediately at 1-800-222-1222.