

ADVISORY NOTE

Minister for Health

TRIM Ref: MIN19/1007	Health advice on Blue Green Algae
Critical Date	1 October 2019. You are attending the Tuggeranong Community Council Meeting on this date.
Deputy Director-General	Kylie Jonasson / /

Minister's question/s:

Your office requested advice on monitoring blue-green algae and the potential health impacts prior to your meeting with the Tuggeranong Community Council on 1 October 2019.

ACT Health's response:

- Blue-green algae (BGA) grow naturally in Australian fresh and saline waters. Some types of BGA can produce toxins that may be harmful to humans and animals.
- The most common exposure pathway for these toxins is direct contact of skin, eyes, mouth or nose with affected water during water-based recreational activities (e.g. swimming, rowing). Less common pathways of exposure are breathing in fine water spray or droplets created when the surface of affected water is broken during waterbased recreational activities and accidental swallowing of affected water.
- Possible health affects vary with type of toxin and route of exposure:
 - Skin and eye allergic reactions or irritation from direct skin contact;
 - Gastrointestinal symptoms from accidental swallowing; and
 - Asthma or hay feverlike symptoms from breathing in fine water spray or droplets during recreational water activities.
- Some types of BGA release chemicals, unrelated to toxins, that can produce a strong odour during algal blooms. There is no evidence to suggest that the odour can cause toxic effects, however the odour is an annoyance that may impact on general well-being. The odour from Lake Tuggeranong was a significant concern to community members in 2018, however this information did manage the majority of these concerns.
- Concerns were raised by a minority of community members about the possible health effects of exposure to airborne toxins carried by the wind away from the lake. Based on the current evidence available, health advice is that if you have no direct contact with affected water but you live or work near an affected waterway, it is very unlikely that you would be exposed to harmful levels of blue green algae toxins in the air.

- A blue green algae fact sheet was developed and made available ([Attachment A](#)). The Chief Health Officer attended a community meeting on this issue earlier this year and provided copies of the fact sheet. The summer season communication strategy is being updated to proactively include messaging on this issue.

Management of Recreational Water Quality

- The ACT Guidelines for Recreational Water Quality (GRWQ) provide a framework for the management of recreational water sites within the ACT. It addresses risks from BGA and microbial pathogens and includes guidance as to when public access to a waterway should be restricted to minimise any potential negative health effects.
- The ACT Government, Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and Transport Canberra and City Services are responsible for the management of Lake Ginninderra, Lake Tuggeranong, Molonglo Reach and the Murrumbidgee River Corridor. The National Capital Authority is responsible for the management of Lake Burley Griffin.
- The EPA undertakes recreational water monitoring throughout the year that includes the assessment of visible planktonic algal conditions. This program is supported by the Health Protection Service who monitor the presence of microbial pathogens between September and April annually.
- Members of the public are reminded to check signage at recreational areas prior to entering the water.
- The ACT Government is conducting pilot projects to research and address recreational water quality issues, including BGA.

Noted / Please Discuss

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**Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health**

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