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## **Potential for Blue-Green Algae in Ohio River** *Health Departments Urge Precautions over Holiday Weekend*

As Tristate residents take to the river this weekend, local health departments say conditions are favorable for blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, to bloom locally. Algal blooms occurred east of Portsmouth, Ohio, but none have been detected in the Greater Cincinnati river water.

"We want people to have fun on the water while being on the lookout in case blue-green algae develops, and to avoid contact if they see it," stated Tim Ingram, Hamilton County Commissioner.

Ohio EPA, Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission and Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW) are monitoring Ohio River water quality and will continue to do so over the weekend.

Public water systems have water treatment processes designed to remove toxins if they occur. Drinking water has not been affected at this time, according to GCWW.

Under the right conditions, blue-green algae can bloom in water – usually in lakes, ponds and slow-moving rivers – when there is sunlight, warm temperatures and excessive amounts of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) in the water.

Although many species of blue-green algae do not produce toxins, some species can cause harmful algal blooms (HABs). Some HABs are visible as thick mats or scum on the surface of the water. These mats may look like spilled paint and can vary in color, including bluish-green, bright green, or even red or maroon.

HABs can produce toxic chemicals which may make people and pets sick depending upon the amount and type of exposure. This is especially true for the very young, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems. Types of exposure include swallowing HABs-contaminated water, skin contact, and inhaling aerosolized water droplets. HABs toxins can cause a rash, hives, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain and more severe symptoms at higher levels of exposure.

“Many people will be enjoying water-related activities this weekend, particularly with the Riverfest celebration,” said Dr. Noble Maseru, Cincinnati Health Commissioner. He continued, “We encourage everyone to enjoy this holiday weekend while being mindful of river conditions.”

Avoid water that:

- Looks like spilled paint
- Has surface scums, mats or films
- Is discolored or has colored streaks
- Has green globs floating below the surface.

Wash after swimming.

In some cases, skin irritation will appear after prolonged exposure. If symptoms persist, consult your health care provider.

Prevent pets and livestock from coming into contact or ingesting water containing harmful algal blooms.

If you or your pet comes into contact with blue-green algae, rinse off with clean, fresh water as soon as possible.

Seek medical attention if you become sick after recreating on the river and think you may have had contact with HABs. Contact your veterinarian if your pet gets sick.

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