



**Health and Human Services
2652 Murphy Rd**

608-742-9227
FAX: 608-742-9700
TDD: 608-742-9229
E-MAIL: DHHS@co.columbia.wi.us
WEBSITE: www.co.columbia.wi.us

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 136
Portage, WI 53901-0136

Date: July 16, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE CAN BE A HEALTH HAZARD

Columbia County – Health officials are reminding people to watch out for blue-green algae blooms in Columbia county waterways this summer, and to avoid swimming in water where a visible scum or mat of blue-green algae is present.

“When blue-green algae are present in high numbers, some bathers who swim in affected waters may experience eye, ear, or skin irritation, or gastrointestinal problems like vomiting and diarrhea,” said Susan Lorenz Columbia County Health Officer.

Blue-green algae, technically known as cyanobacteria, are found naturally in Wisconsin lakes and ponds at low levels. As the weather gets warmer, conditions become more favorable for the cyanobacteria to bloom, or increase greatly in number. Blooms may be visible as thick mats on the surface of the water, can be bluish green to red in color, and often have a bad odor.

Some species of blue-green algae found naturally in our waterways produce toxins that may cause muscle cramps, twitching, paralysis, nausea, vomiting, or liver failure, and even death in animals. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services typically receives several reports of dogs and livestock dying after drinking water containing blue-green algae every year.

To protect your family, pets and livestock, it is best to stay away from the suspect water. Water that is cloudy, looks like green paint or pea soup or has floating clumps may contain blue-green algae capable of producing toxins that can be dangerous to human and pets. If these conditions exist, you are advised not to swim or swallow water, water-ski, allow pets to swim or drink, or allow children to play in the water. It is always recommended to rinse off after swimming. Often it is enough to move livestock or recreational activities to the opposite side of the lake to avoid a harmful bloom.

For more information, and some basic guidelines to help you avoid exposure to blue-green algal blooms, call the Columbia County Flood Health and Safety Hotline at 608-742-9735 or visit either the Columbia County website at <http://www.co.columbia.wi.us> or the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website at:
<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/eh/Water/fs/Cyanobacteria.pdf>.

END