

Blue-green Algae

Fact Sheet



General Information

What is Blue-green Algae?

Despite their name, Blue-green Algae are not algae at all. They are photosynthetic bacteria, also called 'cyanobacteria', which rely on sunlight for energy.

Blue-green Algae are present in almost all aquatic ecosystems, including creeks, rivers, lakes and wetlands. Individual cells are microscopic in size, so Blue-green Algae can be present in a water body without being visible.

As environmental conditions become more favourable, algae numbers start to increase rapidly and blooms or scums, become easily visible on the water surface. Blooms range in colour from dark green to yellowish-brown and develop a paint-like consistency as they dry out at the water's edge. A blue pigment may also be seen as they dry.

Why are Blue-green Algae a problem?

They spoil water quality when present in large numbers by producing toxins, odours and/or thick scums. The toxins they produce are poisonous to humans, and may be deadly to livestock and pets. There are no simple tests which you can do to check for algal toxins. When algae decompose they may use up oxygen in water and cause fish kills.

You should contact Lower Murray Water if you have any queries about your water supply.

What are the effects of Blue-green Algae toxins on human health?

Skin contact through showering, bathing, swimming, water skiing and other recreational activities may result in skin irritation and rashes, swollen lips, eye and ear irritations, sore throat, hay fever symptoms and asthma.

Drinking water affected by Blue-green Algae may cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, liver complications and muscle weakness. The more water you drink, the sicker you may become.

If you experience medical conditions that you think may have been caused by Blue-green Algae affected water, you should visit your local doctor or hospital.

Contact with people and animals.

Algae blooms can cause major problems. With an unsightly appearance and often also a pungent smell, they can make affected water unappealing for recreational activities, such as swimming, boating or fishing. Water affected by a bloom is unsuitable for agricultural use.

For further information please visit
www.lmw.vic.gov.au
or telephone 03 5051 3400

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Tank Water For Rural Customers

Can I drink water with Blue-green Algae in it?

No! The water needs to be filtered through appropriate quality activated carbon to remove any toxins. Toxins will not be removed by boiling, or by using household disinfectant. Speak to Lower Murray Water if you have any concerns about your water supply.

Can I cook with water with Blue-green Algae in it?

No! Boiling water does not remove toxins from the water.

Is water containing Blue-green Algae safe for washing clothes or dishes?

Alternate water supplies should be used if possible.

If there are no alternatives, take extra care by:

- Using rubber gloves when washing clothes and dishes;
- Rinsing dishes in uncontaminated water;
- Removing surplus water with a tea towel; and
- If possible, giving the laundry a final rinse with alternative water. Sun drying clothes and storing them for a few days can also help.

Will hot water systems remove toxins from water with Blue-green Algae in it?

No! Boiling or heating the water does not remove any toxins.

Can I water fruit or vegetables with water which has Blue-green Algae in it?

Fruit and vegetables do not appear to take up toxins. However, it is recommended that water affected by Blue-green Algae does not come in contact with plants being grown for food. This is especially important for salad vegetables.

Before eating fruit and vegetables, wash and rinse them thoroughly with uncontaminated water.

When Blue-green Algae are present should I pump from the water body at a greater depth?

If there is no alternative water supply it may be better to use water from areas not covered by scums or from deeper in the river or storages as at depth the water may be less contaminated.

What should I do with my tank if Blue-green Algae is confirmed as being present in the river system?

Lower Murray Water recommends you isolate your tanks from any contaminated water supplies such as the river system etc until the Blue-green Algae reduce in numbers.

If Lower Murray Water is aware of any blooms we will notify all customers Blue-green Algae is present in the water supply and advise customers to isolate their water supply from the main system.