JOINT NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BLUE-GREEN ALGAE BLOOMS SPOTTED IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY WATERWAYS
PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE CAUTION

STOCKTON, CA (August 28, 2014) - A water quality issue that can adversely affect both people and animals is the presence of blue-green algae. The recent hot and humid weather in San Joaquin County, combined with low river flows in many of the area’s waterways contribute to the rapid growth of blue-green algae blooms that may produce harmful toxins.

Only a few types of blue-green algae produce toxins, but if present, they can irritate the skin and when ingested, can cause stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting. Water-contact sports and recreational exposure to toxic blue-green algae can also cause irritation to the eyes and skin, as well as mouth ulcers. At high enough levels, these toxins may cause damage to the liver and nervous system. Exposure to algae toxins can produce numbness, tingling, dizziness and muscle weakness, which can lead to difficulty breathing or heart problems, thus requiring immediate medical attention. If you think you are experiencing symptoms related to exposure to blue-green algae, contact your doctor or the Poison Information Hotline (800-222-1222) right away. If your pet displays symptoms such as seizures, vomiting, or diarrhea after contact with surface water, contact your veterinarian right away.

Because you can’t tell if an algae bloom is toxic just by looking at it, public and environmental health officials advise people to avoid swimming, wading, skiing or coming into contact with the water in areas where a green to bluish-green foam, scum or mat of algae is present. Staff from the San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department has posted Health Advisory signs at local marinas cautioning swimmers, boaters and recreational users.

Public and environmental health officials urge everyone to protect their health and that of their family, friends and pets during a blue-green algae bloom by taking these precautions:

- Keep children, pets, or livestock from swimming in the water or drinking the water.
- Avoid swallowing or inhaling water droplets, as well as skin contact with water.
- If skin contact does occur, wash with soap and water or rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove the algae.

- more -
• Avoid using the water for drinking, food preparation, bathing, or showering.
• Do not boil the water. Boiling will not remove the toxins and may even release more of the toxin into the water.
• Avoid cooking with the water because food may absorb toxins from the water during cooking.
• Do not rely on water jug filtration systems as they do not protect against the toxins.
• Do not treat the water with a disinfectant such as chlorine bleach. This may break open algae cells and release toxins into the water.
• Because toxins are more likely to collect in animal tissues, health officials recommend that people who choose to eat fish from waters where algae blooms are present should be cautious and remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking.

For more information, visit:

• San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department:  http://www.sjcehd.com or call (209) 468-3420
• San Joaquin County Public Health Services:  http://www.sjcphs.org
• California Department of Public Health:  http://www.cdphe.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx
• State Water Resources Control Board:  http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/bluegreen_algae/
• Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment:  http://oehha.ca.gov/ecotox/microcystins.html
• U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:  http://www.cdc.gov/
• U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:  http://epa.gov/gmpo/habpage.html

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Attachments:  Blue-green Algae – Frequently Asked Questions Sheet
Health Advisory for Waterways in San Joaquin County (English/Spanish)
BLUE GREEN ALGAE
Frequently Asked Questions

BLUE GREEN ALGAE HEALTH CONCERNS

WHAT ARE BLUE GREEN ALGAE?
Blue green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, are simple plants found naturally in water and wet environments.

WHAT IS A BLUE GREEN ALGAE BLOOM?
When conditions are right, algae can rapidly build up or “bloom” on the surface of reservoirs, rivers, creeks, lagoons, lakes and ponds. The bloom can be green, blue green, white or brown, and may look like a floating layer of scum or paint.

WHAT CAUSES BLOOMS?
Warm temperatures, calm water and nutrients such as fertilizer, manure runoff or septic tank discharges, contribute to the rapid growth of algae. Blooms can occur at any time, but are most common between June and October.

HOW DO I KNOW IF A BLOOM IS TOXIC?
Only a few types of blue green algae are known to produce toxins. Most blooms of algae in our region are made up of harmless green algae. Often, the first sign that a bloom is toxic is a dog that has gotten sick after swimming in stagnant water. Always look for the signs of an algae bloom before you enter the water, or before you let your children or pets enter the water.

HOW DANGEROUS IS TOXIC ALGAE?
Exposure to toxic algae during recreational activities, by touching the skin or accidentally inhaling or swallowing the water, can cause rashes, skin and eye irritation, sore throat, asthma-like symptoms, allergic reactions, gastrointestinal upset, numbness, tingling, dizziness and other effects. The long-term effects of these exposures are not well known, but children and pets are at greatest risk. Dogs can be exposed to high levels of toxins because they more readily drink water that smells or tastes bad and lick their fur after swimming.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SEE A BLOOM?
♦ Stay out of areas where the water has foam, scum, or mats of algae. Keep children, pets and livestock out of such areas at all times. If you or your pets swim or wade in water with algae, rinse off with a clean source of water as soon as possible. Always warn young children not to swallow any water, whether or not you see signs of algae.
♦ Do not drink or cook with this water. Even if you boil, filter or treat it, the toxins can persist.
♦ Get medical treatment right away if you think that you, your family member, pet or livestock might have been poisoned by blue green algae toxins.

WHAT ABOUT FISHING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES?
Eating fish caught during a bloom may pose a health risk. Always remove the guts and liver, and rinse fillets in tap or bottled water before eating the fish. Other activities near the water such as camping, picnicking, biking and hiking are safe.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department:
www.sjcehd.com • (209) 468-3420
San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS)
www.sjcphs.org
California Department of Public Health (CDPH):
www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx
U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/habs
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
www.epa.gov/gmpo/habpage.html
HEALTH ADVISORY
FOR WATERWAYS IN
SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY
DUE TO LOW RIVER FLOWS AND WARM
TEMPERATURES THERE HAS BEEN AN
INCREASE IN ALGAE GROWTH

- Avoid swimming or wading in areas with visible concentrations of algae or scum
- Avoid jet-skiing, windsurfing, or water-skiing over algae or scum
- Do not use this water for drinking or cooking
- Do not consume fish livers or digestive organs, and wash fillets with tap or bottled water

Children and pets are at greatest risk of getting sick.

For more information contact:
- San Joaquin County Environmental Health Department: (209) 468-3420
- California Department of Public Health Website: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx
Advertencia de Salud para los ríos en el Condado de SAN JOAQUIN

Debido a los bajos niveles de agua en los ríos y a temperaturas calientes, el crecimiento de algas dañinas ha aumentado.

- Evite nadar o meter los pies en las áreas donde vean concentración de algas o espuma
- Evite usar los jet-skis, windsurf, o esquiar sobre algas o espuma
- No use esta agua para beber ni para cocinar
- No coma hígados de pescado ni otros órganos digestivos, y lave los filetes con agua de la llave o embotellada

Niños y mascotas corren mayor riesgo de enfermarse.

Para más información comuníquese con:
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- California Department of Public Health Website: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx