



June 27, 2019

To: Local Health Officers and Environmental Health Directors

From: Interagency Working Group on Harmful Algal Bloom Related Illnesses

The purpose of this letter is to bring attention to the 2019 harmful algal bloom (HAB) season and to offer assistance for responding to blooms in your jurisdiction. We are also requesting your assistance with reporting HAB events and HAB-related human and animal illnesses to the state centralized system described below. Reporting suspected HAB-related illnesses will assist us in estimating the impact of HABs and identifying actions that will help to address HABs statewide. Local Health and Environmental Departments play a key role in warning the public about the dangers associated with local HABs. The information below summarizes the 2018 bloom season reports, describes the reporting process for blooms and potentially related illnesses, and provides links to updated HAB-related resources and contacts.

The occurrence of HABs appears to be increasing in inland waters (including rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, and estuaries) of California. This has led to an increase in the public's concern regarding potential health impacts to humans and animals, particularly dogs. Most blooms occur in spring to fall, but can begin earlier or continue year-round in some locations. In 2018, 190 reports of potential blooms were received, and state and local agencies posted approximately 145 public health alerts at waterbodies throughout California. The interagency HAB-related Illness Working Group received 44 reports of potential HAB-related human and animal illnesses in 2018. Following further evaluation of the available environmental and health related information, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) reported 19 cases to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System (OHHABS) as [suspected, probable, or confirmed link to HAB exposure](#). These reported cases included 8 human, 4 domestic animal, and 7 fish or wildlife incidents.

For the upcoming year, please use one of the following options to report HAB occurrences and HAB-related human and animal illnesses (suspected or confirmed) to the centralized database as soon as possible.

- Online: [Freshwater Bloom Incident Form](#)
- Telephone: 1 (844) 729-6466 (toll free)
- Email: CyanoHAB.Reports@waterboards.ca.gov.

[A visual guide fact sheet](#) is available to assist with identifying HABs by appearance, color, and odor. The CDC has a webpage with information on [symptoms of HAB-related illness](#) in people and animals that can also be obtained by contacting the California Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222).

Reporting a HAB incident through any of the options above will trigger a multi-agency coordination effort consisting of the following:

- The Tracking California program at CDPH and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) will contact your department to collect additional information on reports of a human or animal illness that may be HAB-related.
- If the reported illness involves fish or wildlife, OEHHA will inform the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and assist in collecting the relevant data.
- All HAB reports will prompt staff from the California Water Boards to contact the Local Health Department to assist with the HAB identification and early response.
- The Environmental Health Investigations Branch at CDPH can answer questions if you suspect a HAB-related illness. Contact information for the branch is included below.
- Health Departments are encouraged to use the [signs and guidance](#) prepared by the [California Cyanobacteria and Harmful Algal Bloom \(CCHAB\) Network](#) for posting public health alerts at water bodies when HABs pose a health threat.

Several additional resources are available through the [California HABs Portal](#), including:

- [Frequently asked questions about HABs](#);
- [HAB Incidents Reports Map](#) with voluntarily reported blooms in California;
- Potential impacts to [human health](#), [domestic animals](#), and [fish and wildlife](#);
- [Healthy water habits](#) to protect humans and pets;
- [Field sampling guide](#) including a [Visual Guide to Observing Blooms](#); and
- [Other important HAB-related information](#).

These resources focus on inland HABs occurring in freshwater, estuarine and lagoon environments. For information on HABs in coastal marine areas and marine biotoxins in seafood, refer to CDPH's [Marine Biotoxin Monitoring Program](#), OEHHA's [FAQs about domoic acid in seafood](#), and [CalHABMAP](#).

Please contact the staff listed below with feedback or questions relating to these efforts.

- Tracking California: Susan Paulukonis (Susan.Paulukonis@cdph.ca.gov; 510-326-7260)
- OEHHA: Beckye Stanton (Rebecca.Stanton@oehha.ca.gov; 916-322-2088) and Reggie Linville (Regina.Linville@oehha.ca.gov; 916-327-7336)
- CDPH Environmental Health Investigations Branch: Jeff Fowles (Jeff.Fowles@cdph.ca.gov; 510-620-3665)
- State Water Resources Control Board: Marisa VanDyke (Marisa.VanDyke@waterboards.ca.gov; 916-322-8431) and Keith Bouma-Gregson (Keith.Bouma-Gregson@Waterboards.ca.gov; 916-322-8430)
- CDFW: Glenn Sibbald (Glenn.Sibbald@wildlife.ca.gov; 916-358-4390) and Krysta Rogers (Krysta.Rogers@wildlife.ca.gov; 916-358-1662)