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Potential Health Risks Force Closure of Utah Lake from Harmful Algal Bloom
Lab tests confirms a high probability of health risks

SALT LAKE CITY - Public health officials have decided to close Utah Lake, effective immediately, due to a large, harmful algal bloom that may pose a serious health risk to the public and animals. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and Utah County Health Department (UCHD) say lab results for samples collected by the Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) show the concentration of algal cells in the water are three times the threshold for closing a body of water.

According to Dr. Joseph Miner, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Health, “These types of algae release neurotoxins and hepatotoxins, that can affect brain, nervous system, and liver function.”

“Water with these levels of concentration in the algal bloom pose serious health risks,” says Ralph Clegg, Executive Director of UCHD. “To protect the health of people and animals that use the lake, it is necessary for the lake to remain closed until it is safe for recreation.”

UDOH and UCHD will issue an order to close the lake until further notice. DEQ and State Parks and Recreation support the closure of Utah Lake. State and local health departments have the legal authority to close public places, such as a lake, to protect the health of the public. UCHD has previously issued advisories regarding algal blooms on Utah Lake due to public health concerns, but this is the first time the entire lake has been closed. Efforts have been made to post signs at harbors and known public access locations around the lake noting that the lake is closed. Even if no signs are present, the closure of Utah Lake is still in effect.

Water Quality crews began collecting samples Wednesday after a recreational user on Utah Lake reported a large algal bloom extending from Provo Bay to the State Park Harbor. Satellite imagery from Tuesday afternoon indicates that the algal bloom covers about 90 percent of the lake (surface and subsurface). DWQ and UCHD continue to collect samples for testing, some of which will be available later today.

Initial water sample results indicate the bloom is comprised almost entirely of a single species of toxin-producing cyanobacteria. High counts were detected at 36 million cells per milliliter (ml) of water at the Provo Marina, and 34 million cells/ml in the open water, which is three times greater than the threshold considered a high probability of acute health risk by the World Health

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Organization. Results of toxin analysis to determine the magnitude of toxicity are expected early next week.

“While algae may not always be visible on the lake, the threat to human and animal health can still be present. Toxins can persist in the water for several days after algae dissipate.” said Erica Gaddis, Assistant Water Quality Director for DEQ. “One of the ways we protect the health of people and animals is by testing water for the presence of toxin producing algal species.”

Although algae are a natural part of many freshwater ecosystems, under the right conditions they can proliferate to create large algal blooms. High levels of nutrients in the water, combined with warm temperatures, abundant sunlight, and calm water, can promote rapid algal growth, resulting in the extensive, bright-green or blue-green blooms. Wastewater treatment plants are the largest contributors of nutrients to Utah Lake in addition to fertilizer runoff from lawns and agricultural areas. These blooms can contain harmful cyanobacteria, a type of bacteria (often referred to as blue-green algae) that produces toxins that can pose risks to humans, wildlife, domestic animals and fish. Symptoms of cyanotoxin poisoning include headache, fever, diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, and sometimes allergic-like reactions from skin contact.

For concerns about possible human exposure, call Utah Poison Control at 800-222-1222, or your physician. For concerns about possible animal exposure, contact a local veterinarian. For concerns about possible livestock exposure, contact Utah Department of Agriculture and Food at 801-538-7100. We are asking health officials of both human and animal who hear of possible symptoms from the Utah Lake algal bloom to contact the Utah Poison Control hotline.

If you have taken fish from the Lake since July 10, 2016, state officials recommend against eating the fish. Fishing in river areas near Utah Lake is not recommended until further notice.

Utah County has an alert system. For updates on lake conditions, go to alerts.utahcounty.gov and sign up for an account. After signing up, select the method of contact, create a profile, and select a location. Then choose the alert subscription for “Utah Lake” under “Utah County Alerts.”

DWQ recently identified Utah Lake as impaired for recreational uses due to the prevalence of algal blooms in its draft 2016 Integrated Report. The report is currently out for public comment with a public hearing scheduled for Tuesday, July 19, 2016.

DEQ and our partners will continue to provide updated information at:

<http://deq.utah.gov/locations/U/utahlake/algal-bloom.htm>

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About DEQ

Established in 1991, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality’s (DEQ) mission is to safeguard public health and quality of life by protecting and enhancing the environment. DEQ implements state and federal environmental

laws and works with individuals, community groups and businesses to protect the quality of Utah's air, land and water. For more information, visit www.deq.utah.gov, follow DEQ on Facebook ([utahdeq](#)) and Twitter ([UtahDEQ](#)), or call 1-800-458-0145.