

Public Health Alert

AUGUST 4, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In cooperation with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Idaho Power Company, Southwest District Health (SWDH) is issuing a health alert due to the presence of a harmful algal bloom in the Brownlee Reservoir. Recent samples taken indicate high concentrations of bacteria-producing blue-green algae are present and may cause illness to humans and animals.

Blue-green algae bacteria occur naturally. Blue-green algae blooms occur in waters with high levels of nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. Under certain conditions, some types of algae can release toxins into the water that are harmful to people, pets, and livestock. **Recent tests indicate that these toxins are present.** The blooms are generally green, or blue-green, and may form thick mats along shorelines. These may look like a surface scum, resembling pea soup and can have an unpleasant odor or stench.

SWDH and DEQ advise the following precautions be taken where blue-green algae blooms are known to be present:

- Humans, pets, and livestock should not drink the reservoir water.
- Humans and animals should stay out of the reservoir. Swimming, wading, or other activities with full body contact of reservoir water should be avoided.
- Fish should be cleaned and rinsed with clean water. Only the fillet portion should be consumed. All other parts should be discarded.
- Pets and livestock are vulnerable to blue-green algae and should stay out of water where blooms are visible. Pets and livestock can be exposed to blue-green algae through drinking, swimming, or self-grooming by licking their wet coat or paws. A reaction will likely require immediate veterinary attention.
- Do not allow pets to eat dried algae.
- If reservoir water contacts skin or pet fur, wash with clean potable water as soon as possible.
- Areas of visible algae accumulation should be avoided.

Samples taken indicate unsafe bacteria counts, so everyone should heed these precautions and avoid contact with the water.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who are exposed to water with high concentrations of blue-green algae may experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty breathing, skin irritation, allergic responses, liver damage, or neurotoxic reactions such as tingling fingers and toes. Symptoms in humans are rare, but anyone with symptoms should seek medical attention. Boiling or filtering the water will not remove blue-green algae toxins.

For more information about harmful algal blooms, visit DEQ's website at <http://www.deq.idaho.gov/water-quality/surface-water/recreation-health-advisories/>

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