

**Universal talking points for discussing harmful algal blooms:**

- Algae are naturally occurring, tiny, floating plants that use sunlight and nutrients from water to feed and reproduce. They are an important food source for aquatic animals. There are many different species of algae.
- Nutrients flow into water bodies from storm water runoff, fertilizer, agricultural runoff and from regulated facilities like sewage treatment plants. Sunlight, nutrients and warm temperatures are perfect conditions for an algae “bloom.” Blooms are more likely to occur during hot, dry weather from June to September.
- Most algal blooms are harmless.
- Some algae can produce toxins or irritating chemicals during blooms. A few algae also can produce toxins when present in smaller numbers, not during a bloom.
- Algal blooms usually change the color of the water – green in freshwater, often with surface scum; red or brown in salt water. Blooms also may kill fish due to reduced oxygen in the water.
- **WHEN IN DOUBT – STAY OUT!** Never swim in water that is discolored, has an odor, or if there are dead fish or other animals present.
- If you get algae on your skin, rinse well with clean water. Symptoms from harmful algae exposure can include upset stomach (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea), skin rash, tingling or burning and coughing. Children and pets are most vulnerable because they are more likely to swallow the water; even a small amount can cause illness. If you have health concerns from algae exposure, contact your medical provider.
- Report algal blooms using the online form at [www.SwimHealthyVa.com](http://www.SwimHealthyVa.com).
- Report suspected health effects of harmful algal blooms (“HABs”) to 888- 238-6154

**Talking points for describing Virginia’s efforts to monitor algal blooms:**

- The Virginia HAB Task Force is a joint effort of several state agencies and educational institutions which collaboratively conduct surveillance and response for algal blooms. This group has been working to protect the public from HAB threats present off Virginia’s coasts for 20 years.
- If the HAB Task Force detects a bloom which may cause a threat to public recreational waters, advisories may be issued to limit the potential for human and domestic animal exposure (that’s right, pets and farm animals can be exposed too).
- The HAB Task Force reports results of algae investigation samples on the Harmful Algal Bloom Map. To see results or to learn more about bloom sampling results, visit [www.SwimHealthyVa.com](http://www.SwimHealthyVa.com).