

11TH U.S. SYMPOSIUM ON HARMFUL ALGAE

WHAT DOES THE PUBLIC KNOW ABOUT HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS? RESULTS FROM A NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY OF U.S. ADULTS

The term harmful algal bloom (HAB) has been used to describe both algal and cyanobacterial blooms that can harm people and animals; signs and symptoms may vary based on the toxin, exposure pathway, or other factors. Public health messaging may need to be tailored to account for these differences. Limited information about public awareness, prevention behaviors, and notification preferences is available to public health practitioners and partners to inform message development. A nationwide, weekly opt-in Internet panel survey was used to gain insight on these topics. During September 8-10th, 2021, 1,007 U.S. adults responded to a Porter Novelli survey which included 10 questions related to HABs. Survey results were weighted by gender, age, region, race/ethnicity, and education to form a nationally representative sample. The most frequently recognized terms included red tide (50%), toxic algae (45%), and blue-green algae (44%). More participants identified 'harmful algae' (77%), 'toxic algae,' (76%) and 'harmful algal bloom' (72%) as terms that sounded like they could make them sick compared to other terms. Participants were more likely to contact a local/state health department (61%) or beach/park staff (51%) about symptoms related to water exposures. Similarly, participants looked to local/state government (64%) or beach/park staff (61%) to provide information about unsafe swimming conditions. More than half (56-68%) recognized behaviors that could help to prevent illness during a HAB and were unlikely to enter water that smelled bad (77%), was discolored (75%), had scum/algae on the surface (73%), or was cloudy (61%). Indirect experiences with HABs, such as hearing about people getting sick (28%), were more frequently reported than direct experiences, such as taking steps to protect themselves (14%) or changing their plans to visit a water body (13%). CDC and partners can use these survey results to help inform public health communication efforts related to HABs.

AMY JACOBI, HEALTH COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST | CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Amy Jacobi is a Health Communication Specialist in the Waterborne Disease Prevention Branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She earned a Master of Public Health from the Colorado School of Public Health and a BS in Environmental Health from Colorado State University. Amy joined CDC in 2019 and focuses on clearly communicating health information about water-related diseases, including ways to prevent illnesses from harmful algae and cyanobacteria.

PUW6@CDC.GOV

Co-Authors:

Megan E. Gerdes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Chenega Enterprise Systems & Solutions, LLC), Virginia Roberts (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), Marissa Vigar (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), Muhammad Thuneibat (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education), Ashley Andujar (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)