GCHD
GRANT COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

1038 West Ivy, Suite 1
Moses Lake, WA 98837

Blue-Green Algae: FAQs

1. **When will Moses Lake be safe?**
   Swimming in any open waterbody involves some risk because it is exposed to the environment and is not monitored or treated. Concerning algae toxins, there must be two consecutive weeks of sample results showing the toxin (microcystin) level is less than 6 ppb (parts per billion) before the lake can be deemed "safe". Sampling results can be found on our webpage: http://granthealth.org/blue-green-algae-monitoring/. For reference, in 2018 the toxins stayed above 6 ppb until November.

2. **Why aren't you testing everywhere?**
   GCHD does not have any funding for this program and is currently relying on a citizen volunteer group called: "Cyanobacteria Surveillance by Citizens, Users, and Managers" or CSCUM. GCHD also partners with King County Environmental Laboratory to conduct the toxin testing on the samples, however, they too are limited on funding. By limiting the number of samples taken early on, our goal is to be able to sample throughout the entire season.

   It's important to be able to recognize potential toxic algae blooms and avoid them, even if results are not available. Toxins can move and spread through the lake with wind and water currents. Results from last year's sampling showed that the toxins can be present in one part of the lake and can move to other parts of the lake within days. When toxins are found in one part of the lake, it means there could be toxins in other parts of the lake as well.

3. **Where have you sampled and what are the results?**
   All our sampling information can be found here: http://granthealth.org/blue-green-algae-monitoring/. We will update the page as more sample results are received.

4. **How do people get exposed to toxic algae?**
   People can be exposed through skin contact or ingestion (swallowing) of water with algae toxins.

5. **What are the symptoms of toxic algae poisoning?**
   Symptoms of toxic algae poisoning may take 30 minutes to 24 hours to appear, depending upon the size of the person or animal, and the amount of toxins consumed. Algae toxin poisoning may include skin rashes, jaundice (yellowing of skin and/or eyes), shock, stomach cramps, weakness, nausea, vomiting, severe thirst, rapid/weak pulse and death. The most common result of human poisoning with microcystins is liver damage. Microcystin is also being studied for its potential to cause cancer.

6. **Is it okay to eat the fish I caught?**
   Toxins can build up in fish tissues, especially the liver, kidneys and other organs. Before eating, remove the internal organs and properly discard the guts.

7. **Can I water our lawn, pasture or garden with lake water?**
   Any potential skin exposure should be minimized to avoid any skin rashes, and no lake water should be consumed. For watering your garden, there is limited research on this topic. To err on the side of caution, if you have an alternative source of clean water for your garden, you should use it for watering, especially if watering the edible parts of your plants. You should follow standard food safety advice and wash all fruits and vegetables in drinking water before eating them. If you have any pets or animals, be aware that they could lick the grass or their wet fur and potentially ingest toxins.

8. **What is being done about the algae? Has it been treated yet? Was this algae toxin here and we never knew about?**

   The Moses Lake Watershed Council held a public meeting in May, and the presentation given covered a lot of historical information about algae in Moses Lake. To see that presentation, as well as to find out more information about efforts to address the issue, please visit https://www.columbiabasincds.org/moses-lake-watershed-council

9. **Is the lake safe for my dog?**
   Because dogs are smaller than adult humans, it takes much less toxin for them to become sick and possibly die. Keep your dog away from any exposure to the lake until the toxin warning is lifted, and even then, be aware of any potential blooms.

10. **I saw people swimming in the lake, does that mean it's safe?**
    Our website and Facebook page will be updated when we lift the warning for algae toxins, and we will downgrade our signs to CAUTION. Website: http://granthealth.org/blue-green-algae-monitoring/. Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/GCHD.WA/

11. **What can I do to help?**
    This year (2019) is the first year GCHD has used a volunteer monitoring program, CSCUM. We were looking for volunteers earlier this year but now have plenty of people to call on for sampling this season. Stay tuned for announcements looking for volunteers next year.

    In the meantime, you can do the following: maintain your septic system to avoid leakage into the lake and do not use lawn fertilizers with phosphorous, as phosphorous is the key nutrient for the algae growth.