



## **Cyanotoxin Related to the Detroit Lake Algal Bloom: What does it mean for your health?**

May 31, 2018

Salem Drinking Water Services recently issued a Health Advisory for vulnerable populations due to detection of cyanotoxins in their drinking water systems. It is safe for most people age 6 and over to drink affected water. This advisory affects groups considered to be vulnerable to the toxin at the current levels.

### **Based on the current water quality, what populations are considered vulnerable to the toxins in the water?**

Vulnerable populations who should take steps to prevent exposure to include:

- Infants, children age 5 and under
- people with compromised immune systems
- people receiving dialysis treatment
- people with pre-existing liver conditions
- pregnant women or nursing mothers
- pets and other sensitive populations

Other healthy individuals may drink the water at this time. If this information changes the advisory will be updated as needed.

### **What is the current situation?**

- Detroit Lake has harmful algal bloom containing cyanobacteria.
- Water from the North Santiam River downstream of the lake is used by several communities for drinking water supplies.
- Small amounts of two cyanobacteria-related toxins have been found in public water supplies in the City of Salem, City of Turner, Suburban East Salem Water District and Orchard Heights Water Association.
- There is a do not drink advisory in place for certain vulnerable populations in the affected communities.

### **What are cyanobacteria?**

- Cyanobacteria, also called blue-green algae, are single-celled organisms that grow in water.
- In warm weather, when nutrients are plentiful, they may grow quickly or “bloom”, sometimes producing toxins.
- Cyanobacteria release multiple toxins. The two toxins that have been detected in this bloom are *Microcystin* and *Cylindrospermopsin*.

### **How do vulnerable populations prevent exposure to the toxins?**

- People who follow the drinking water advisory (<https://www.cityofsalem.net/Pages/drinking-water-advisory.aspx>) and the recreational advisory for Detroit Lake (<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/ERD/Pages/HealthAdvisoryIssuedMay23DetroitLake.aspx>) will avoid further exposure.
- Toxins are not removed by boiling water. Boiling water will not prevent exposure.

### **What are the possible health effects of exposure to cyanobacteria?**

- Signs of possible exposure may include nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, skin irritation, and allergic responses.
- People exposed to cyanobacterial toxins through dialysis water contamination may experience life-threatening liver damage.
- Some cyanotoxins can injure the nervous system. None of these have been detected in the affected drinking water.

### **What treatments are available?**

- There are no antidotes or cures for toxin exposure.
- Healthcare providers may be able to treat symptoms.
- For most patients, the key is to avoid dehydration or electrolyte problems.
- For those with underlying liver or kidney disease, evaluation might be prudent, along with guidance to ensure people avoid any further exposure.

### **When should people see a healthcare provider?**

- A health care professional may be able to treat your symptoms.
- See a healthcare provider if you have **severe** nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, skin irritations and allergic reactions.