IDENTIFYING ILLNESS DUE TO BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

✔ Exposure History  ✔ Clinical Signs  ✔ Diagnosis  ✔ Treatment  ✔ Reporting

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM
Blue-green algae (also known as cyanobacteria) are non-pathogenic photosynthetic bacteria that grow in outdoor water bodies and produce toxins such as microcystins, cylindrospermopsin and anatoxin-a. They can grow quickly and form large blooms, especially in warm weather.

Scope of the problem in California:
- Toxic blooms occur throughout California and are increasing in number, frequency and severity.
- Dog and livestock deaths in California have been linked to blue-green algal toxins.

EXPOSURE
Animals can be exposed to blue-green algae and its toxins by:
- Contacting any infected water body including lakes, rivers, ponds, etc. Because animals are attracted to blue-green algae, they drink the water and eat algal material. Dogs in particular lick algae caught in their fur after being in the water.
- Consuming water and algae from residential pools or decorative ponds.
- Ingesting blue-green algae health supplements.

CLINICAL SIGNS, DIAGNOSIS and TREATMENT: See page 2. Limited funding may be available to cover physical examination of ill dogs with suspected poisoning (see page 3).

BIOSPECIMEN COLLECTION, HANDLING and SHIPPING: See pages 3 and 4. Limited funding may be available to collect and analyze some of the suggested canine specimens (see page 3).

REPORTING: Reporting confirmed or suspected cases will help prevent other animal and human exposures to blue-green algal toxins. Please complete the Illness Information Section on the Report Form available at https://drinc.ca.gov/cyanohab/. For questions call the State Water Resources Control Board at (844) 729-6466.

From the California Cyanobacteria and Harmful Algal Blooms Network. For more information see: www.mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/

Prepared by: OEHHA - California Department of Public Health
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPOSURE HISTORY</th>
<th>CLINICAL SIGNS</th>
<th>DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS</th>
<th>LABORATORY DIAGNOSTICS</th>
<th>TREATMENT OPTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Access to any outdoor water body up to 48 hours prior to onset of symptoms.     | **Hepatotoxin (microcystin)**  
Onset within minutes to days:                                                                 | Acetaminophen overdose; rodenticide, mushroom toxin, aflatoxin and other hepatotoxin poisonings, other hepatopathy | Elevated ALP, AST, ALT, GGT, bile acids, bilirubin  
Coagulopathy  
Hypoglycemia  
Hypoproteinemia  
Toxin present in clinical specimens† | Remove access to contaminated water, clean fur  
Emesis induction and oral activated charcoal slurry may be helpful  
Oral cholestyramine has been effective up to 7 days post exposure‡  
Cyclosporin A, rifampin and intravenous silibinin may be helpful*  
Supportive therapy |
| (including dried material near shore or on land). Also includes residential pools and ponds containing algae.  
Potential for ingestion of water or algal material (including dried material near shore or on land). Includes cleaning algae off fur.  
Ingestion of blue-green algae health supplements. | **Nephrotoxin, hepatotoxin (cylindrospermopsin)**  
Onset within minutes to days:  
* Similar to microcystin and  
* Excessive thirst  
* Increased urination  
* Ataxia | NSAID overdose, ethylene glycol, grape/raisin ingestion, other nephrotoxin poisonings, other nephropathy or hepatopathy | Similar to microcystin and  
Proteinuria, glycosuria, hematuria  
Elevated BUN and creatinine  
Hypokalemia  
Toxin present in clinical specimens† | Remove access to contaminated water, clean fur  
Emesis induction and oral activated charcoal slurry may be helpful  
Supportive therapy |
|                                                                                   | **Neurotoxin (anatoxin-a)**  
Within minutes to hours:  
* Ataxia  
* Seizures, paralysis  
* Respiratory arrest, sudden death | Pesticide poisoning, mycotoxins penitrem A and roquefortine, other toxin poisoning, myasthenia gravis | Toxin present in clinical specimens† (Anatoxin-a can be measured in serum and urine) | Remove access to contaminated water, clean fur  
Emesis induction and oral activated charcoal slurry may be helpful  
Supportive therapy  
Artificial ventilation |
|                                                                                   | **Dermal toxins**  
Within minutes to hours:  
* Rash, hives  
* Allergic reaction | Other dermal allergens                                                                                       |                                                                                                                  | Remove algae and clean fur                                                                                   |

†Stomach, rumen or GI contents, water and, for anatoxin-a only, serum and urine. See the following pages for details. Necropsy is encouraged when applicable.
‡Rankin et al., 2013, *Toxins*, 5, 1051-63 (78.4 mg/lb, mixed with water, PO, q 24 h).
*Merck Veterinary Manual
**Live Animal**: For biological specimen submission, download and complete the standard CAHFS submission form. See text below for possible funding.

Turn-around time for analysis is approximately 10-14 days for all samples. Contact CAHFS staff for current information.

Submit samples on ice for overnight delivery to CAHFS.

**Potential Funding Source for Canine Cases**: For California Veterinary Medical Association members ONLY when testing is conducted at CAHFS. Funding may be available to cover costs of all the following:

- live canine physical examination
- canine necropsy at your clinic
- algal toxin analysis
- canine clinical specimen collection
- specimen shipment to CAHFS

Apply for funding by completing the Illness Information Section of the Freshwater Bloom Incident Report Form at [https://drinc.ca.gov/cyanohab/](https://drinc.ca.gov/cyanohab/)

**Dead Animal**: Necropsy

Necropsy is highly recommended to assist diagnosis. For necropsies done at a private veterinary clinic, include on the CAHFS submission form the description of any gross abnormalities. CAHFS will conduct large animal necropsies and histopathology. CAHFS does not conduct canine histopathology (see next page for alternatives).

Contact CAHFS (530-752-8700, [http://cahfs.ucdavis.edu](http://cahfs.ucdavis.edu)) for non-livestock species necropsy availability, cost and turn-around time. CAHFS does not return carcasses to owners post-necropsy.

---

**Specimen Minimum Amount Preservative Submit for Cost (3/2017) Comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specimen</th>
<th>Minimum Amount</th>
<th>Preservative</th>
<th>Submit for</th>
<th>Cost (3/2017)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stomach contents if available</td>
<td>100 g</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>Vomitus or gastric lavage prior to charcoal administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serum</td>
<td>5 mL</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>Anatoxin-a only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine</td>
<td>20 mL</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>Anatoxin-a only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>1 L</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>From algal bloom site – include some algal scum if available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Turn-around time for analysis is approximately 10-14 days for all samples. Contact CAHFS staff for current information. Submit samples on ice for overnight delivery to CAHFS.
**Dead Animal**: For specimen submission download and complete the standard CAHFS submission form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specimen</th>
<th>Minimum Amount</th>
<th>Preservative</th>
<th>Submit for</th>
<th>Cost (3/2017)</th>
<th>Comments*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stomach, rumen or GI contents</td>
<td>100 g</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serum</td>
<td>5 mL</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>Anatoxin-a only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine</td>
<td>20 mL</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>Anatoxin-a only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>1 L</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>From algal bloom site – include algal scum, if available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>10 g</td>
<td>Formalin - do not freeze</td>
<td>Histo-pathology</td>
<td>Check with the lab</td>
<td>Include any lesions: Large animal – send to CAHFS Small animal – send to IDEXX, Antech or other private vet lab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Analysis turn-around time is approximately 10-14 days for all samples. Contact CAHFS staff for current information.

**For samples sent to CAHFS, submit samples on ice with overnight delivery.**

For small animal liver samples, contact private lab such as: IDEXX — [www.idexx.com/smallanimal/](http://www.idexx.com/smallanimal/) or 888-433-9987

Antech — [www.antechdiagnostics.com](http://www.antechdiagnostics.com) or 888-397-8378

---

**NON-DOMESTIC ANIMALS - CAHFS can analyze only the gastric contents of wildlife suspected of blue-green algal toxic poisoning.** Blue-green algal toxin analysis is not available through any other California State Agency at this time.

Download and complete the standard CAHFS submission form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specimen</th>
<th>Minimum Amount</th>
<th>Preservative</th>
<th>Submit for</th>
<th>Cost (3-2017)</th>
<th>Comments*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stomach, rumen or intestinal contents</td>
<td>100 g</td>
<td>Chilled/frozen</td>
<td>Toxin analysis</td>
<td>$125-150</td>
<td>Vomitus or gastric lavage prior to charcoal administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Clinical Case Consultation**

For additional assistance contact the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center: (888) 426-4435. Available 24 hours/day, 365 days/year.

There is a $65 consultation fee.

---

Technical information in this fact sheet was reviewed by veterinarians from the California Department of Public Health Veterinary Public Health Section, California Department of Food and Agriculture Animal Health Branch and CAHFS Toxicology Laboratory.