

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Harmful Algal Bloom Advisory Issued for Blackwater River arm of Smith Mountain Lake in Bedford, Franklin, and Pittsylvania Counties, VA

Public Advised to Avoid Water Contact in Affected Areas

(Roanoke, Va.) – The Blackwater River arm of Smith Mountain Lake in Bedford, Franklin, and Pittsylvania counties are experiencing a harmful algal bloom (HAB). **The public is advised to avoid contact with the water until algal concentrations return to acceptable levels.** The reported blooms have produced blue/green discoloration and algal scums that should be avoided. Some harmful algae, called cyanobacteria, can cause skin rash and gastrointestinal illnesses, such as upset stomach, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The area to avoid can be seen on an interactive [Harmful Algal Bloom map](#). A status report containing the advisory area may be viewed at [Smith Mountain Lake – Blackwater River HAB Status Report June 6, 2023](#).

Sample results from collections on June 1 indicated a swimming advisory is necessary due to unsafe levels of cyanobacteria, which have the potential to produce multiple toxins. Toxin results at these sites are pending but will not change the advisory. People and pets are advised to avoid swimming, windsurfing and stand-up-paddle-boarding, as well as other activities that pose a risk of ingesting water in this area. **Activities such as boating may continue with proper precaution in the advisory area.** Follow-up samples indicating algae and toxins are below levels of concern are necessary to lift the advisory – dates of next sampling are to be determined.

The areas within the Blackwater River arm of Smith Mountain Lake where samples were collected:

Blackwater River

- Unnamed Creek cove; Blackwater River at Kemp Ford Road
- Blackwater River cove at Virginia Key Trail
- Blackwater River cove near Anthony Ford Landing

Algal blooms can occur when warm water and nutrients combine to make conditions favorable for algal growth. Most algal species are harmless. However, some species may produce irritating compounds or toxins. Avoid discolored water or scums that are green or bluish-green because they are more likely to contain toxins.

To prevent illness, people should:

- Avoid contact with any area of the lake where scums are present or water is green or blue-green or an advisory sign is posted,

WHEN IN DOUBT, STAY OUT!

- Not allow children or pets to drink from natural bodies of water.
- Keep children and pets out of the areas experiencing a harmful algal bloom and quickly wash them off with plenty of fresh, clean water after contact with algal scum or bloom water.
- Seek medical/veterinarian care if you or your animals experience symptoms after swimming in or near an algal bloom.
- Properly clean fish by removing skin and discarding all internal organs and cook fish to the proper temperature to ensure fish fillets are safe to eat.
- Contact the Harmful Algal Bloom Hotline at 1-888-238-6154 if you suspect you experienced health-related effects following exposure to a bloom.
- Visit www.SwimHealthyVA.com to learn more about harmful algal blooms or to report an algal bloom or fish kill.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force, which includes the VDH, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and the Old Dominion University Phytoplankton Laboratory, will continue to monitor water quality in the lake. In general, advisories will be lifted following two consecutive test results (a minimum of 10-days apart) with acceptable levels for algal cell counts and/or toxin concentration. An advisory may be lifted or maintained at the discretion of the health department. For example, after one test an advisory may be lifted if results are within safe levels for swimming if other information indicates exposure or human health risk is low. The [Harmful Algal Bloom map](#) is updated to reflect the HAB advisory status of the Blackwater River arm of Smith Mountain Lake. The recent advisory extent is summarized in the [Smith Mountain Lake – Blackwater River HAB Status Report June 6, 2023](#). For more information visit www.SwimHealthyVA.com.