

# Trinity River tests positive for blue-green algae

August 20, 2014

Officials from the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) report that toxins associated with blue-green algae have been detected in the Trinity River. Health advisory signs are being posted, and confirmation testing is currently under way.

Low flows along several other local rivers including the South Fork Eel, Van Duzen and Mad Rivers, coupled with sustained high temperatures in the inland areas and record low rainfall have created the ideal conditions for blue-green algae.

Blue-green algae can be present in any fresh water body. It looks like green, blue-green, white or brown scum, foam or mats floating on the water. Usually it does not affect animals or people. However, warm water and abundant nutrients can cause blue-green algae to grow more rapidly than usual. These floating algal masses or "blooms" can produce natural toxins that are very potent. Dogs and children are most likely to be affected because of their smaller body size and tendency to stay in the water for longer periods.

DHHS is aware of 11 dog deaths which may have been caused by blue-green algae poisoning since 2001. The dogs died shortly after swimming in Big Lagoon, the South Fork Eel River and the Van Duzen River. Last year there was a reported dog illness that was suspected to be caused by toxic algae on the Mad River near Blue Lake, but this was not confirmed by water samples.

Most algal blooms in California contain harmless green algae. While the presence of blue-green algae toxins have been confirmed in some instances on the South Fork Eel and Van Duzen Rivers, it is difficult to test and monitor the many miles of our local rivers with conditions that may readily change. Most blooms do not contain toxins. To stay safe, it is best to assume that an algal bloom has the potential to contain toxins.