

# Toxic algae closes some Italian beaches

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Swimming has been banned along sections of the Italian coastline because of blooms of toxic algae, a report said Tuesday.

Officials last Friday halted swimming from beaches near the northern Italian city of Genoa when a 60-year-old man had to be hospitalized, the Italian news agency ANSA reported. Such high concentrations of *Ostreopsis ovata* -- a type of algae that release neurotoxins into the air -- sent more than 200 people to Genoa-area hospitals during a similar incident last year.

The people became ill after swimming in the algae or inhaling toxins carried to the beach by winds, ANSA said.

Earlier this month, authorities banned swimming at the resort of Fregene, near Rome. Those who ignore the prohibition face fines.

"The algae do not represent a major health danger," Donato Greco of the Italian Health Ministry's National Center for the Control and Prevention of Illness told ANSA. "There is only a risk of slight poisoning in rare cases with particularly sensitive subjects"

Increasingly frequent outbreaks of the algae are blamed on global warming.

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