

Harmful algal bloom becomes detectable along western Lake Erie

August 2 2021, by Miriam Marini



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Nearly a month into bloom season, a harmful algal bloom has been detected along Lake Erie's shores by the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science.

The [bloom](#) stretches from Toledo to Port Clinton, near the lake's west end, according to satellite images from the agency. Harmful algal blooms are the rapid growth of microscopic algae that can negatively impact human and animal health, according to the organization.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and researchers are forecasting this summer will see a smaller harmful algal bloom this summer, similar to last year—marking the first time in more than a dozen years that mild blooms have occurred in consecutive summers.

This year's bloom is expected to measure a 3 on a severity index developed by the NOAA and other researchers, but could range between 2 and 4.5. The largest algae blooms since the problem returned to Lake Erie in the late 1990s were at 10 and 10.5 on the severity index, in 2011 and 2015, respectively.

The microcystis cyanobacteria bloom was first detected by officials this week. Weekly advisories have been issued throughout harmful algal [bloom season](#), which began in July.

According to NCCOS, "Harmful algal blooms (HABs) occur when colonies of algae—simple plants that live in the sea and freshwater—grow out of control while producing toxic or harmful effects on people, fish, shellfish, marine mammals, and birds."

The bloom on Lake Erie's west end has an area of approximately 40 square miles and is patchy with some scum in calm waters. Officials warn that if you see scum, you should stay out of the water.

Microcystis, which is the most common bloom forming genus of cyanobacteria, can form a layer of green scum in Lake Erie and releases a toxin called microcystin. The scum can clog the coolant systems of boat engines and microcystin can pose a risk to drinking water, cause

skin irritation, and negatively affect wildlife, pets and livestock.

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