

How does red tide impact beachgoers?

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Many people are flocking to the Gulf Coast for spring break. However, toxic red tide algal blooms have put beachgoers and residents on alert.

In the Gulf of Mexico, red tide is caused by a [microscopic organism](#) called *Karenia brevis*. The organism was detected in 172 samples along

Florida's Gulf Coast last week, according to Florida officials.

Dead fish and other marine life are washed ashore on beaches because of harmful algae. Red tide occurs when microscopic algae multiply to higher-than-normal concentrations, often turning the water red or brown.

Red tide produces toxins, and when people or animals are exposed to them, they can become sick. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), exposure to red tide may cause respiratory and eye problems, and other [health issues](#) in people.

"Red tide is a problem. It's a problem along the west coast of Florida, predominantly from algae overgrowth, and it can cause respiratory symptoms," says Dr. Arveen Bhasin, a Mayo Clinic allergist.

She recommends people take precautions. "When the tide is high, or we know it's coming in, stay indoors, keep the windows closed. If you're prone to more reactive airway disease, make sure you have your inhalers available and be in close contact with your provider for additional management if needed."

People and animals are exposed to algal toxins by eating shellfish, fish containing toxins or by swimming in contaminated water.

Contact your health care team if you've been exposed to [red tide](#).

The CDC also recommends contacting your poison control center hotline at 1-800-222-1222. Specialists may be able to offer information as well.

The National Centers for Coast Ocean Science (NCCOS) monitors and provides harmful algal bloom forecasts for the Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of Maine, Lake Erie and, soon, the Pacific Northwest.

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