

## Warning issued for possible toxic algae blooms in river

People, pets, livestock should stay out of Caloosahatchee

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The Lee County Health Department is urging caution when it comes to venturing into and around the Caloosahatchee River for at least the next week, as a blue-green algae bloom that can cause harm to humans and animals has shown up on recent water tests.

Health Department Spokeswoman Diane Holm said the agency is recommending people, livestock and domestic animals keep out of the water until those results come in.

She said the bloom has the potential to produce a toxin that causes a range of symptoms, from cramps and vomiting to diarrhea and fever.

"We're asking people to be cautious," Holm said. "If it turns out it's at toxic levels and we didn't issue this statement, people are going to get sick and we don't want that without giving them the choice. We want people to know there's that possibility."

Kurt Harclerode from Lee County's Department of Natural Resources said the bloom is located very close to the Franklin Lock, in Clewiston.

Even though it's miles away from Cape Coral, and the Yacht Club Beach, Harclerode said people should exercise caution and common sense while enjoying the city's waterfront opportunities.

"If it doesn't smell right, take precautions," he said.

He also said aerial photos have revealed what looks like a red tide algae bloom closer to the waters of Fort Myers and the Cape, but he could not confirm for certain that red tide is headed our way.

He said the Caloosahatchee actually needs some water released from Lake Okeechobee around this time of the year. Without the water being pumped with slight releases of fresh water, it sits stagnant and leads to the types of algae blooms now plaguing the water near the lock.

Since the natural flow of the river has been altered so greatly over the years, the system needs small releases during the dry season, but no water releases during the summer.

The delicate balance of the river is always in flux, he said, and these types of blooms are a result of trying to maintain that balance.

"The system is not in good shape," he said.

Harclerode added that test results of the algae bloom will be known soon.

"We won't know the toxicity until those results come back," he said.

Meanwhile, the city of Cape Coral is keeping an eye on the situation, but has no plans to post any warnings at the Yacht Club Beach, according to city spokeswoman Connie Barron.

