

2 Water safety
& illnesses

3 Swimmer's
itch

4 Harmful algal
blooms (HABs)

THE NORTH COUNTRY HEALTH EFFECT

A health & safety guide brought to you by the Clinton County Health Department.



Recreational water safety

Local lakes, pools and rivers offer physical activity and a chance to cool off from the heat of the summer months. Whether you plan on being on the water or in it, follow these tips to keep the focus on fun and fitness.

Water Safety

Drownings are a leading cause of injury death for children ages 1-14 and usually aren't the violent, splashing call for help that most people expect.

- **Be attentive while supervising children in or near water—drowning happens quickly and quietly.** Avoid any other activities, such as reading or talking on the phone, even if lifeguards are present.
- **Secure your at-home pool** with appropriate barriers, including a fence with a self-latching gate. Place a safety cover on the pool and remove any ladders or steps used for access. Store pool toys out of sight when not in use, as they may attract younger children.
- **Do not use toys, like water wings or foam noodles, in the place of life jackets**—they are not designed to keep swimmers safe. **Use U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets.**
- **Know the local weather conditions and forecast** before swimming or boating. Strong winds and thunderstorms with lightning strikes are dangerous.
- **Learn to swim.** Enroll your child in swimming lessons to reduce the risk of drowning. **Use the “buddy system.” Never swim alone.**
- **Learn CPR.** In the time it takes for help to arrive, your CPR skills could save a life.
- **Choose bathing suits in colors that are easily seen in water** - avoid blues and teals.



Water Illnesses

Recreational water illnesses (RWIs) are spread by swallowing, breathing in mists of, or having contact with contaminated water. They usually result in a gastro-intestinal illness or “stomach bug.”

- Don't swallow water in pools, hot tubs, lakes, or rivers.
- Shower before swimming to protect others from germs you may have.
- Take lots of bathroom breaks while swimming—and make sure your children do too.
- Stay out of the water if you or your children have diarrhea.



Swimmers Itch

Swimmer's itch, a type of skin rash, is caused by an allergic reaction to microscopic parasites that infect some birds and mammals. The parasites are released from infected snails into freshwater lakes, ponds and rivers. They can burrow into the skin causing an allergic reaction and rash.

After swimming in contaminated water, you may experience tingling, burning or itching of the skin. Small reddish pimples appear within twelve hours. Those pimples can develop into small blisters. Itching may last up to a week or more, but will gradually go away.

Most cases of swimmer's itch do not require medical attention. If you have a rash, try the following for relief:

- Use corticosteroid cream.
- Apply cool compresses to the affected areas.
- Try Epsom salts, baking soda or oatmeal baths.
- Apply baking soda paste to the rash (made by stirring water into baking soda until it reaches a paste-like consistency).
- Use an anti-itch lotion.

Try not to scratch. Scratching can cause the rash to become infected. If itching is severe, your health care provider may suggest prescription-strength lotions or creams to lessen your symptoms

Reduce your risk of developing swimmer's itch:

- **Towel dry or shower** right after leaving the water.
- **Don't swim in areas where swimmer's itch is a known problem** or where signs have been posted about unsafe water.
- **Don't swim near or wade in marshy areas** where snails are commonly found.
- **Don't attract birds** (i.e., by feeding them) to areas where people are swimming.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

HABs are the rapid growth of cyanobacteria or algae that can cause harm to people and animals. **These blooms produce toxins that can make people or pets sick.**

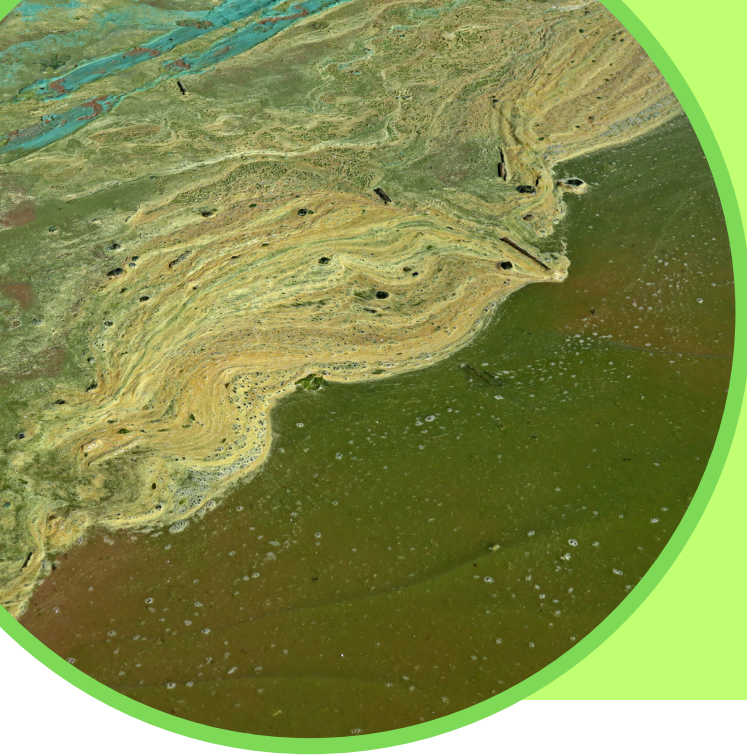
Most algae are harmless, however some species of algae can produce toxins that are harmful to people and animals.

HABs are usually triggered by a combination of environmental conditions like excess nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen); lots of sunlight; and shallow, standing, calm and warm water.

They can look like foam, scum, paint, or mats on the surface of the water.

- People, pets, and livestock should avoid contact with any floating mats, scums, or discolored water. Colors can include shades of green, blue-green, yellow, brown or red.
- Never drink, prepare food, cook or make ice with untreated surface water, whether or not algae blooms are present.





HABs - Know it. Avoid it. Report it.

Before you go in the water, check which waterbodies have blooms or have had them in the past. DEC maintains a HABs **Notifications page** of waterbodies that currently have blooms.

If you suspect that you have seen a HAB, please report the HAB to DEC. Fill out and submit a **Suspicious Algal Bloom Report Form**.

For more health & safety tips, visit **www.clintonhealth.org/nchealtheffect** or scan the QR code.



Information in this guide was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, **www.cdc.gov**); the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH, **www.health.ny.gov**); and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC **www.dec.ny.gov**).