

# Blue Green Algae

## Fact Sheet



The Sydney International Regatta Centre is part of the Penrith Lakes Scheme. It is a man-made lake that receives water from the local catchment.

Water quality is managed by using upstream lakes that hold water that comes into the Scheme. Water is retained in those lakes to allow natural processes remove contaminants such as bacteria and nutrients. Most of the time the water in the lakes is suitable for recreation.

Occasionally after very heavy rainfall, water from upstream has to be passed through into the Regatta lakes to reduce flooding. This nutrient-rich water acts as food for algae in the lakes.

With warm, sunny weather and lots of nutrients, algae can grow rapidly and we may see blue green algal blooms form.

### What are blue green algae?

Blue green algae are simple aquatic plants that occur in all aquatic habitats. There are over 5000 kinds of blue green algae. A few of these can produce poisons that can cause severe health impacts. All blue green algae, however, have chemicals in their cell walls that can cause human health impacts.

### Effects of blue green algae

Exposure to blue green algae can cause skin and eye irritations, earache, gastrointestinal and respiratory effects in people who are sensitive. Asthmatics, children and people with dermatitis are more susceptible to the effects of blue green algae and should exercise caution.

### What can be done?

In a lake system like the Regatta Centre nothing can be done to manage the algal blooms. Instead, we routinely monitor the water to check for algae and if is present, we assess the risk to water users

### Algal alerts

National water quality guidelines developed by the National Health and Medical Council Government tell us what activities can be undertaken safely if there are increased numbers of blue green algae.

#### No / Green alert

Background levels of blue green algae only. All water sports can be undertaken safely.

#### Amber alert

Increased monitoring required. All water sports can be undertaken safely, however increased precautions are suggested after your event.

#### Red alert

Any full body immersion activities such as swimming are restricted.

Activities on the water, such as rowing and canoeing, may not pose a risk, however this is at the discretion of the SIRC under guidance.

### How to reduce risks

Simple precautions can be taken to reduce the risks of being affected by blue green algae. These include:

- Shower after contact with the water
- Avoid swallowing water
- Avoid wetsuits
- Leave the water if you notice any effects.

### What to do if you feel effects

Should you feel the effects of blue green algae (itchy skin, breathing problems or sore eyes and/or ears) you should leave the water immediately. Health effects can be experienced several days after contact with the water. Should this be the case you are asked to report this to the Public Health Unit **02 4734 2022**.