

Do you swim your dogs? It's great exercise and a wonderful way to cool off during the summer months. However, be aware of the presence of blue-green algae at your favorite swimming spots. As one heartbroken dog owner in Michigan found out, the effects of algae toxicity are immediate, and in some cases such as his dog's, fatal. Go to this website to see what blue-green algae looks like: <http://snr.unl.edu/lakes/powerpoints.asp>

THE DANGERS OF BLUE GREEN ALGAE

Bob Tatus

It is with a very heavy heart that I write this and I apologize for its length. Please, PLEASE pass this around.

On Monday, June 25, 2007 I took my healthy 9 month old Border Collie Vita swimming at approximately 6:30 p.m. Vita and two other BC's spent about an hour and a half diving off the dock, chasing the Water Kong, and running around.

The temperature that day was just over 90 degrees, but none of the dogs looked particularly winded or hot.

Vita emerged from the water and looked as if she was going to vomit. She threw up lake water three times. I wasn't particularly concerned as she took in a lot of water from retrieving and swimming so much and had seen other dogs do that in the past without complications.

After the third time throwing up, she lay down and closed her eyes. Her tongue was hanging out of her mouth and I began to suspect she may have heat stroke. I immediately placed ice on her stomach and checked her gums. They were pink. I took her temperature which was 101.9, still normal. I then called my Vet who said these conditions did not indicate heat stroke and said I needed to get emergency medical attention right away.

Vita was not responsive and when I picked her up to put her in the car she was limp and her eyes were still closed. Her breathing was slow and her heart was racing. I arrived at the emergency clinic only a half hour from the time she showed signs of distress. The ER Vet asked me what sorts of things Vita had been doing all day. I explained that she was crated as I was gone for the latter part of the afternoon and that upon coming home, the only other place she went was to the lake.

Vita's eyes were fixed and dilated and the Vet suggested there was already brain damage. After administering an IV and oxygen, the Vet called me in and said Vita was not responding and that it appeared that she was suffering from some kind of toxic poisoning. Her heart rate was 200. He mentioned that he had recently seen a couple of dogs who died from Blue Green Algae Toxicity. I told him that the lake had what appeared to be algae blooms on the surface of the water. Neither of the other two dogs showed any of the signs that Vita had and that either dog took in as much water as Vita apparently did. We decided to put her on a ventilator overnight and give her a "chance" to pull through.

When I got home I did a Dogpile.com search of "Blue Green Algae Toxicity in Dogs" and found some very disturbing information.

-Blooms can occur at any time, but most often occur in late summer or early

fall. They can occur in marine, estuarine, and fresh waters, but the blooms of greatest concern are the ones that occur in fresh water, such as drinking water reservoirs or recreational waters.

-Some cyanobacterial blooms can look like foam, scum, or mats on the surface of fresh water lakes and ponds. The blooms can be blue, bright green, brown, or red and may look like paint floating on the water. Some blooms may not affect the appearance of the water. As algae in a cyanobacterial bloom die, the water may smell bad.

-Some cyanobacteria that can form CyanoHABs (Harmful Algal Blooms) produce toxins that are among the most powerful natural poisons known. These toxins have no known antidotes.

-Swallowing water that has cyanobacterial toxins in it can cause acute, severe gastroenteritis (including diarrhea and vomiting).

-Liver toxicity (i.e., increased serum levels of liver enzymes). Symptoms of liver poisoning may take hours or days to show up in people or animals. Symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhea, and vomiting.

-Kidney toxicity.

-Neurotoxicity. These symptoms can appear within 15 to 20 minutes after exposure. In dogs, the neurotoxins can cause salivation and other neurologic symptoms, including weakness, staggering, difficulty breathing, convulsions, and death. People may have numb lips, tingling fingers and toes, or they may feel dizzy.

Vita had indeed exhibited salivation and signs of weakness, staggering, difficulty breathing and vomiting.

At 7:00 a.m. on Tuesday, June 26, 2007 I called the Vet and was told that they took Vita off the ventilator a couple of times during the night and that she was not breathing on her own. I told him to discontinue the procedure and to let her go.

I called the DNR here in Michigan and was told that Blue Green Algae didn't usually appear this time of year and I told the agent that the conditions were that of late summer in Michigan, very hot for the last two days and reminded him that Blue Green Algae can appear at any time. He told me not to panic or to alarm other people. I told him that had someone else panicked, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now.

For the time being, I would strongly suggest you watch your dogs when swimming in small lakes and ponds as the potential threat of toxic poisoning from Blue Green Algae is prevalent. Had I known that algae of any kind was toxic, you can be sure my dogs wouldn't be swimming anywhere and that Vita, whose name quite ironically meant "life" in Latin, would be alive today.

Missing you more than you can imagine.
May you rest in peace, Red Top Vita
09/05/06 - 06/26/07