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Public health advisory issues for Willow Creek Reservoir

A health advisory prompted by high algae levels found in Willow Creek Reservoir, near Heppner, Ore., was issued today by the Oregon Department of Human Services and the Morrow County Health Department.

Water sampling has confirmed the presence of blue-green algae in concentrations that can produce toxins harmful to humans and animals. These levels can be associated with dangerous toxin concentrations in the water, according to World Health Organization guidelines. Swallowing or inhaling water droplets should be avoided, as well as skin contact with water by humans or animals. The toxins cannot be removed by boiling, filtering or treating water.

DHS recommends that if people choose to eat fish from waters where algae blooms are present, they should remove all fat, skin and organs from the fish before cooking since toxins are more likely to collect in these tissues.

Exposure to toxins can produce symptoms of numbness, tingling and dizziness which can lead to difficulty breathing or heart problems and require immediate medical attention. Symptoms of skin irritation, weakness, diarrhea, nausea, cramps and fainting should also receive medical attention if they persist or worsen. Children and pets are particularly susceptible. The public will be advised when the concern no longer exists.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact, people are encouraged to visit Willow Creek Reservoir and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, picnicking, catch-and-release fishing and bird watching.

For local information contact the Corps' Willow Creek Natural Resource Management Office at (541) 676-9009. For health information, contact Ken Kauffman, DHS Environmental Health Specialist, at (971) 673-0435 or visit <http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/envtox/maadvisories.shtml>.

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