

INVASIVE OF THE MONTH

Harmful algal blooms: Our own version of toxic 'red tide'

From Brodhead Watershed Association



Florida summers are plagued by what is commonly called “red tide,” a dangerous concentration of microscopic algae, *K.brevis*. Toxic to fish, dangerous to swimmers and shellfish eaters, *K.brevis* can even cause serious breathing problems for beachgoers.

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) also happen here in Pennsylvania. Here, HABs are caused by a different organism — blue-green algae or cyanobacteria — but many of the health effects can be similar.

Not all algal blooms are bad for you! Stringy green algae, pond scum and aquatic plants like duckweed may be annoying, but not a health risk. The dangerous kind is very fine-textured and grows as a thin film, either just below or on the surface of slow-moving, warm water. People say it looks like paint, or fine streaks, or pea soup. It’s insidious, too, because HABs are temporary and even after a bloom clears, toxins can remain.

Protect yourself, family and pets: Don’t swim, fish, or boat in areas where you suspect a HAB.

And check out this factsheet for information from the PA Department of Health:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Environmental%20Health/HAB%20FS.pdf>. See PALakes.org, too.

More on invasive plants can be found at brodheadwatershed.org/invasive-species-management-plan/

