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Public Health Advisory Issued for Willow Creek Reservoir

A health advisory prompted by high algae levels found in Willow Creek Reservoir, located near Heppner, OR., was issued today by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS).

Water monitoring has confirmed the presence of blue-green algae that can produce toxins harmful to humans and animals, said Curtis Cude, Hazardous Incident Tracking program coordinator in DHS.

These algae levels are likely to 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. Drinking water from Willow Creek Reservoir is especially dangerous. Cude advised campers and other visitors that toxins cannot be removed by boiling, filtering or treating the water.

DHS advises using another water source not affected by the bloom.

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

Exposure to toxins can produce symptoms of numbness, tingling and dizziness that 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 Lake Reservoir and enjoy activities such as 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 DHS Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program coordinator, 971-673-0438 or www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hab; also the DHS toll-free information line at 1-877-290-6767.

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