

## PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

### Are there health risks with the Forestville Pond Drawdown?

At any time, this water may contain unsafe levels of bacteria, parasites, and toxic blue-green algae that can cause illness in people and pets. Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are at greater risk. Low water levels may increase risk of illness, physical injury, and boating accidents due to submerged objects. Slipping, falls, contact with buried sharp objects, and accidental injury are more likely when water levels are low.

For your safety:

- Keep children and pets away from the water
- Swim at your own risk
- Avoid water that is green, looks like paint, or has surface mats or algal scums
- Do not swallow pond water
- Shower after swimming, and wash hands after any water contact
- Go slow, keep a sharp lookout for objects in the water, and use a depth finder
- Wear shoes, and do not climb on rocks or embankments

### Blue-green algae blooms

Warm, shallow, slow-moving water can promote development of harmful algal blooms (Cyanobacteria/blue-green algae). Blue-green algae, which are present naturally in any water body, can bloom in periods where the water is warm and stagnant. These blooms can produce toxins dangerous to humans and animals.

Algal blooms can appear and disappear within hours. By the time water quality analysis is done, water conditions may have changed from the time a sample was collected. This is why it is so important to follow a common-sense approach. When you see an algal bloom, avoid the water and remember that you should not allow your pets in water where an algal bloom is present! For photos of algal blooms in Wisconsin, see the images page on the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website. For more information on harmful algae blooms go to: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/water/bg-algae/index.htm>.

### Blastomycosis

Blastomycosis is an uncommon, but potentially serious fungal infection. It primarily affects the lungs, and is caused by the fungus *Blastomyces dermatitidis*.

The epidemiologists at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services have found that a reliable predictor of disease occurrence is the historical incidence of Blastomycosis in a geographical area. Blastomycosis is an uncommon disease in Wisconsin, and Door County has had a very low incidence. From 2007 to July 1, 2019, Door County has had less than 5 cases of Blastomycosis reported.

- Blastomycosis is an uncommon but potentially serious fungal infection that is not transmissible from person to person.
- It primarily affects the lungs, and is caused by the fungus *Blastomyces dermatitidis*.
- The fungus is commonly found in soil throughout Wisconsin.
- An individual can only get Blastomycosis if certain specific natural conditions (humidity, temperature, nutrition used by the fungus) exist that allow the spores to become airborne when soil in which the fungus is growing is disturbed. These naturally occurring conditions are changeable.

- Blastomycosis fungus grows when temperatures climb above 50 degrees F.
- People who live around bodies of water have a higher risk of developing blastomycosis in general because they are closer to the habitat it likes.
- Blastomycosis grows best when the soil is wet, then dry, then wet again, for instance, along a riverbed where the river level fluctuates naturally.
- Blastomycosis is notoriously hard to detect in soil, and there isn't a viable way of evaluating risk.
- Protect yourself by avoiding digging or disturbing the soil along shorelines.
- Dogs are also susceptible to Blastomycosis.
- Being exposed to Blastomycosis spores does not mean an individual will become ill.
- Approximately 50% of people who are infected with *Blastomyces dermatitidis* will not have symptoms.
- As with other pathogens, children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are at greater risk.
- Symptoms include a fever and dry cough, which may progress to weight loss, chest pain, and a persistent cough, as well as muscle aches, night sweats, coughing up blood, and shortness of breath.
- Among the infected persons who develop symptoms, the symptoms vary from mild to severe, and can be fatal. A very serious progressive illness involving multiple organ systems can occur in an untreated patient.
- Individuals who think they may have Blastomycosis are encouraged to contact their health care provider. It is treatable with anti-fungal medication.
- For more information on Blastomycosis, go to:  
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p4/p42030.pdf>

Door County Public Health performs regular surveillance of communicable diseases. At all times, we are monitoring and investigating cases of reportable disease, which includes Blastomycosis, and Blue-green algae related illnesses. Door County Public Health works to protect our community from illnesses such as these.