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By [Kristal Dixon](#) and [Shelia Poole](#), The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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The Georgia Environmental Protection Division is awaiting results of a water test at Allatoona Lake to determine if a toxic algae is growing there that can kill animals and sicken humans.

A poisonous microscopic bacteria called ‘blue-green algae,’ could be growing in the lake. It has been blamed for the death of a Cobb County dog as well as others in North Carolina and has been found in an Augusta lake as well.

The water testing was ordered Monday after a Cobb County couple posted on Facebook to say their dog had died after swimming in Allatoona in a cove near Red Top Mountain Road in Bartow County. The algae can be deadly for pets who swallow it — they can die before their owners can get them to a vet.

The lake is a water source for the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority, which on Tuesday issued a public statement that the water is safe to drink. Its own tests for the toxic algae and other contaminants have come back negative.

The same algae is also showing up in Lake Olmstead in Augusta. Savannah Riverkeeper Executive Director Tonya Bonitatibus said Lake Olmstead has tested positive for the presence of four types of dangerous bacteria.

“Blue-green algae is receiving a decent amount of attention right now and I think it’s warranted,” said Bonitatibus. “It’s at the end of the summer and that often brings the algae blooms.”



**Morgan Fleming**

about a month ago

This morning we thought, it's so hot! Let's go to the lake! We took our sweet Arya to the lake and had the best day playing ball and swimming around! About 30 minutes later on the drive home, we noticed her making weird noises and she threw up and pooped in the car. We called our vet on the drive and they suggested we take her in. By this point our girl couldn't even stand... They told us she was in critical condition so we took her to the ER. By the time we got there, she was brain dead... Today was absolutely awful. We lost our fun, loving, and crazy girl to what we can only assume was a lake toxin such as blue green algae. Arya, no dog will ever replace you in our hearts. We already miss you more than you could know. I hope you're running around like a wild girl with all the other boarder collies in doggo heaven



41K

193K

298K

Kevin Chambers, a spokesman with the EPD, said the department Monday collected a sample of the blue-green algae from the cove where the dog had been swimming before it died. Testing on the samples is still underway at Georgia College and State University.

**RELATED** | [Testing ordered after couple says dog died from toxic algae in Allatoona Lake](#)

The same toxin is also believed to be behind the deaths of three other dogs in Wilmington, N.C. According to news station [WECT](#), Melissa Martin and Denise Mintz said their dogs died within hours of each other after swimming in a pond with the algae.

Bonitatibus said the water shown in photos from the Red Top Mountain area of Lake Allatoona site where Arya played appeared to be the color of pea soup. According to the EPD, signs of the bloom's presence include water that looks like pea soup or spilled blue or green paint, reduced transparency, and a thick mat-like spread of scums or dead fish.

"That's the message, people," she said. "If the water looks like it's sick and disgusting, don't get in it."

While results are pending on the Red Top Mountain water sample, the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority said it conducted a test of its water intake site at the lake along Stephens Road near I-75 in Bartow County.

Glenn Page, general manager of the Water Authority, said a team from his office will go out on the lake Friday and gather samples from other areas around the lake. "We want to make sure we don't have the toxins coming our way," he said.

Chambers said if water tests show the presence of the toxic algae, the EPD will work with the Army Corps of Engineers, which manages Allatoona Lake, to determine how it would issue a swim advisory for the community. The Army Corps of Engineers Mobile District said Tuesday on its [Facebook page](#) that it has not received any information or reports of the algae at Carters Lake or Lake Lanier.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [cyanobacteria](#), as the blue-green algae is also known, is naturally occurring and grows in fresh bodies of water such as lakes and ponds. It uses sunlight to make its own food and in warm, nutrient rich environments, cyanobacteria can form blooms that spread across the water's surface.

to respiratory paralysis, or a few days due to liver failure, the helpline said. Humans exposed may have skin symptoms such as a rash, swelling, irritation or sores; gastrointestinal and respiratory problems; fever; headache; neurological and ear symptoms.

Dr. Sherry Weaver, a veterinarian at Animal Hospital of Towne Lake in Woodstock, said diagnosing those symptoms as stemming from contact with the toxin is tricky because there's no test that can be done to detect the bacteria in a pet's blood. A dog who comes in contact with the algae can develop symptoms within two hours, including liver failure.

"There is not much else other than blue-green algae or mushrooms that can do that," she said.

Chambers added there have been no reports of human deaths due to blue-green algae in the U.S., and the EPD does not have any information related to human illnesses stemming from contact with the toxin.

Kirk Underwood of Kennesaw Mountain Veterinary Services said he has been fielding calls from worried pet owners asking whether it was safe to take their dog to the lake. He's told them to avoid places with stagnant water and stay in areas with higher traffic and more activity.

"Obviously avoid areas where there is anything growing on top of the water."

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#### **5 things to know about blue-green algae**

- Cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, is naturally occurring and grows quickly to form blooms on the surface lakes and ponds
- Beware water that looks like pea soup or spilled blue or green paint.
- The algae can be deadly for pets. Death can occur within hours of exposure. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, difficulty breathing, liver failure and paralysis.
- No human deaths have been recorded from toxic algae.
- Humans exposed to the algae may see skin symptoms such as a rash, irritation or sores; gastrointestinal and respiratory problems; headache; and ear symptoms.