

What is blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae, also called cyanobacteria, are microscopic organisms that occur naturally in lakes and rivers. Often they are harmless, but a build-up of blue-green algae can make the water unsafe for people and animals by releasing potentially harmful toxins.

What does blue-green algae look like?

It may look green, blue-green, or brown, and sometimes forms scum on the surface that looks like paint or clumps – see the images below.



What causes blue-green algae?

Blue-green algae grows when there are too many nutrients in the water, especially during warm, sunny weather. This can lead to sudden overgrowths called blooms.

In Northern Ireland, extra nutrients get into water from things like:

- Fertilisers and animal waste (slurry/manure) washing off fields when it rains
- Treated wastewater from homes and businesses being returned to the water environment
- Storm overflows – when heavy rain causes diluted sewage to spill into the water environment to stop flooding
- Waste from private septic tanks and some factories

What should you do if you spot blue-green algae?

If you think blue-green algae is present in a water body, the advice is to stay away from the water.

Report the bloom via the **Bloomin' Algae app** (scan QR code below), or by emailing the location and photos to the NIEA – emergency-pollution@daera-ni.gov.uk

Scan the QR code to download the **Bloomin' Algae app**.

