



Nutrient Pollution

The Effects: Human Health

Nutrient pollution and harmful algal blooms create toxins and compounds that are dangerous for your health. There are several ways that people (and pets) can be exposed to these compounds.

Direct exposure to toxic algae



Drinking water can be a source of exposure to chemicals caused by nutrient pollution.

Drinking, accidentally swallowing or swimming in water affected by a harmful algal bloom can cause serious health problems including:

- Rashes
- Stomach or liver illness
- Respiratory problems
- Neurological affects

Nitrates in drinking water

Nitrate, a compound found in fertilizer, often contaminates drinking water in agricultural areas. Infants who drink water too high in nitrates can become seriously ill and even die. Symptoms include shortness of breath and blue-tinted skin, a condition known as blue baby syndrome.

A 2010 report on nutrients in ground and surface water by the U.S. Geological Survey found that nitrates were too high in 64 percent of shallow monitoring wells in agricultural and urban areas.

Byproducts of water treatment

Stormwater runoff carries nutrients directly into rivers, lakes and reservoirs which serve as sources of drinking water for many people. When disinfectants used to treat drinking water react with toxic algae, harmful chemicals called dioxins can be created. These byproducts have been linked to reproductive and developmental health risks and even cancer.

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