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News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Health Alert

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Jacksonville, FL - The Florida Department of Health has issued a reminder about precautions to take to avoid exposure to algal toxins, in response to results from algae samples from the Lower St. Johns River Basin obtained by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

Independent lab results indicate elevated concentrations of algal toxins in one sample. Algae in the sample, which was collected between July 31 and Aug. 5, was identified as *Microcystis aeruginosa*, which has been observed as a result of monitoring in past years.

Health effects can occur when surface scum or water containing high levels of blue-green algal toxins are swallowed, through contact with the skin or when airborne droplets containing toxins are inhaled while swimming, bathing or showering. Direct contact or breathing airborne droplets containing high levels of algal toxins during swimming or showering can cause irritation of the skin, eyes, nose and throat and inflammation in the respiratory tract.

The Health Department recommends people refrain from recreational uses that could result in ingestion of and/or skin exposure to algal blooms in the river. Children should also not be allowed to play along the shoreline where they might be exposed to clumps of algae or drink water from the river. It is unclear as to whether a health risk exists from ingesting fish from the river in areas where algal blooms are occurring.

Livestock and pet deaths have occurred when animals consume large amounts of accumulated algal scum from along shorelines. Do not allow pets to eat clumps of algae that accumulate along the shoreline.

St. Johns District staff routinely monitor water quality in the river and also collect water and algal scum samples during peak periods for lab analysis to determine what type of algae is blooming and if algal toxins are present. The District is continuing to collect samples for analysis.

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