

## Blue and green (lyngbya) algal toxins

This fact sheet provides information on managing occupational exposure to lyngbya.

### What is lyngbya?

*Lyngbya majuscula* (lyngbya), also known as mermaid's hair or fireweed, is a naturally occurring, toxic, blue-green algae that can occur in bloom proportions in some coastal waters in Queensland.

Exposure to lyngbya can cause severe irritation including:

- skin and eye irritation
- respiratory irritation and exacerbation of pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma following inhalation of dried lyngbya
- gastrointestinal irritation following ingestion of dried lyngbya.

Workers at risk of occupational exposure to lyngbya include those in the fishing, crabbing and prawning industries, marine research workers, professional divers and workers involved in cleaning foreshores where algal blooms are deposited.

### Managing occupational exposure to lyngbya

Persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of themselves, workers and others at risk of exposure to lyngbya.

Lyngbya risks can be managed by conducting a risk assessment that considers both the likelihood and consequences of exposure, implementing suitable control measures, and maintaining and reviewing the control measures.

Lyngbya risks must be eliminated so far as is reasonably practicable, or if this is not reasonably practicable the risks must be minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

Control measures may include:

- providing and maintaining a safe system of work for contact with lyngbya
- ensuring the safe use, handling and storage of lyngbya
- providing any information, training instruction, and supervision that is necessary to protect people from lyngbya risks
- providing adequate hand washing facilities and instruct workers to wash their hands before eating, drinking and smoking and after removing personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent accidental ingestion and skin contamination
- providing suitable first aid facilities for managing accidental contact with lyngbya and instruct workers in first aid procedures.

For seafaring work:

- know the locations of established blooms and be aware of the circumstances affecting their drift
- where immersion is required, provide suitable PPE such as wet suits, stinger suits, dive booties, gloves and safety eyewear.

For beach clean-up operations:

- minimise the number of workers exposed to lyngbya and restrict access by members of the public

- remain upwind of the lyngbya where possible
- keep the lyngbya material damp or wet
- wet the lyngbya material prior to disturbance to avoid particle formation
- use vehicles with enclosed cabins for lyngbya clean-up operations (with the air on internal recirculation where possible)
- secure and cover lyngbya loads prior to transport
- provide workers with suitable PPE to prevent skin and eye contact, including enclosed footwear, long sleeves and pants, gloves and safety eyewear
- where inhalation of dried lyngbya material may occur, provide workers with a particulate respirator (e.g. disposable P2 respirator).

### **Accidental exposure to lyngbya**

The main aim of first aid treatment is to wash areas of the body that have come into contact with lyngbya as soon as possible after exposure has occurred to remove any residual material.

Where skin contact has occurred, wash the area with soap and water. If lyngbya could be trapped in clothing (e.g. swim wear) the clothing should be removed. Cool compresses may provide some relief from skin irritation.

If eye contact has occurred flush the eyes thoroughly with clean water or saline.

Medical attention should be sought if:

- the eyes are affected
- the extent and severity of irritation is causing concern
- the person complains of respiratory discomfort after swimming in affected water or breathing in dried lyngbya material, particularly if they have an existing respiratory condition such as asthma.

If a person develops a serious illness resulting from exposure to lyngbya, including medical treatment within 48 hours of the exposure, it must be notified to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. Find out more about [work health and safety notifications](#).

### **For more information**

Visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.