PHAC Meeting

May 27, 2025

Public Health
Prevent Promote Protect

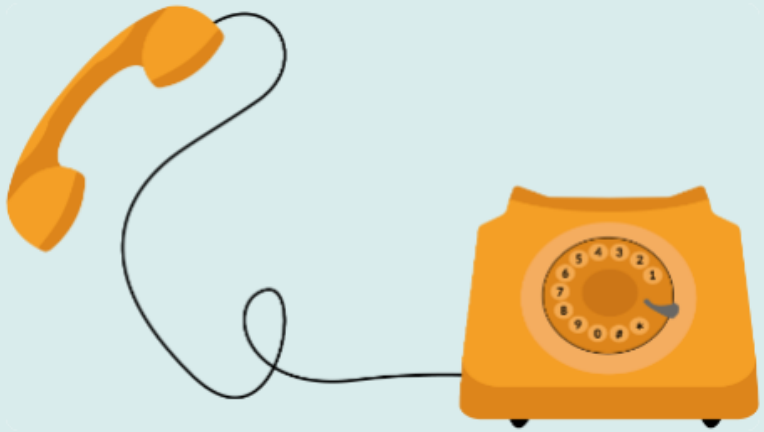
Meeting Agenda

TOPIC	TIME
WELCOME & PHAC BUSINESS • Roll call & icebreaker • Review and approve April 22, 2025, meeting minutes • Public Health recruiting update	5:30-5:55
PUBLIC COMMENT • Public comment (5/27/2025 PHAC agenda items only)	5:55-6:00
LANGUAGE ACCESS VOICEMAIL INBOXES	6:00-6:10
PRENATAL CARE UPDATE	6:10-6:20
PUBLIC HEALTH IN ACTION • Benthic algal mats	6:20-6:35
BUDGET UPDATE	6:35-7:15
UPDATES • Community updates	7:15-7:25
CLOSING • Next meeting: June 24, 2025 (*virtual*) • Adjourn	7:25-7:30

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30) PHAC meetings are recorded and posted (audio only) to the PHAC website per RCW 42.30.220.

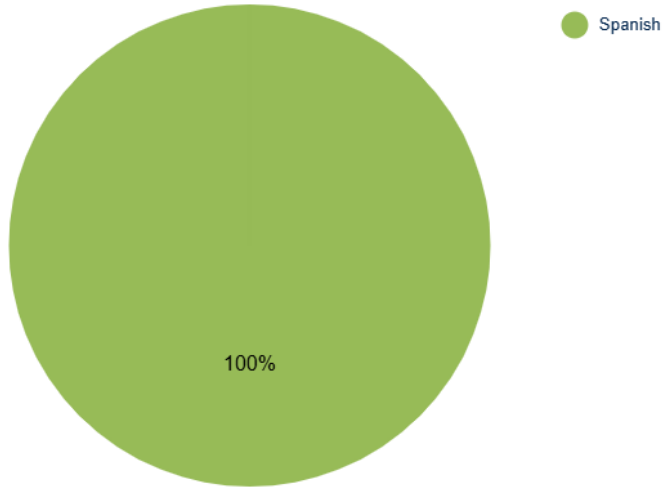
Language Access Voicemail Dashboard

2025 Language access calls

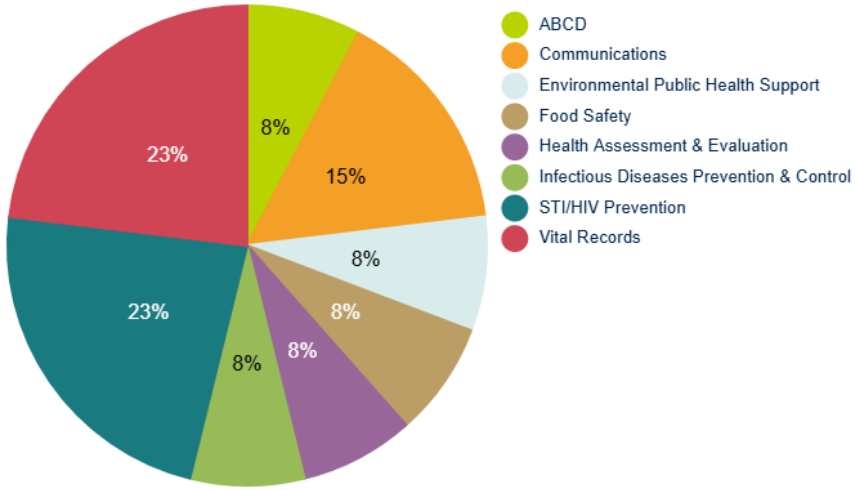


Voicemail inbox tracking	
Assigned & pending	0
2 attempts & no response	0
Caller reached	12
Incomplete contact info	1
Total number of voicemails	13

Language of voicemails



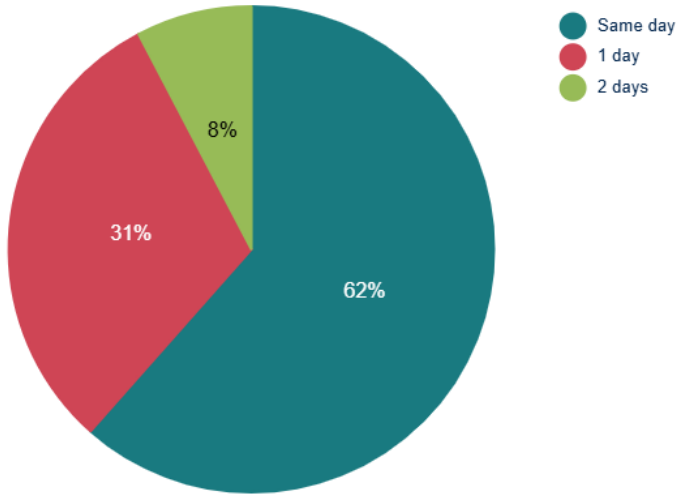
Assigned voicemails by program



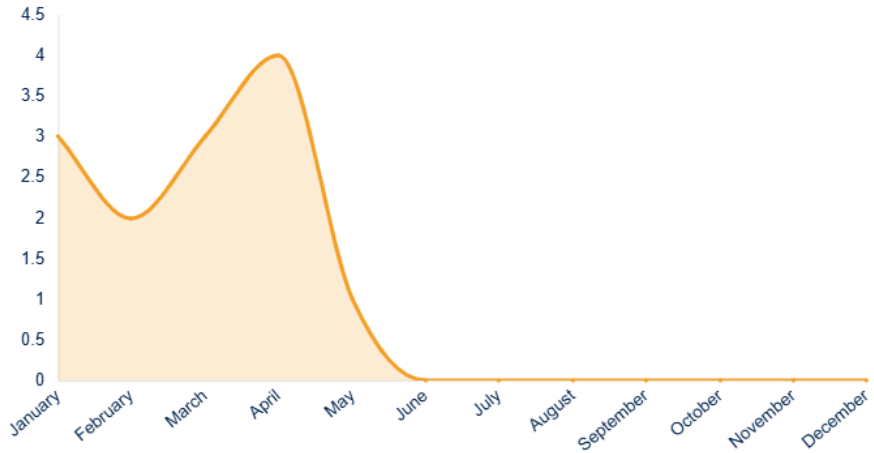
Within the first five months:

- We have received and returned 12 calls.
- All calls have been in Spanish.
- 8 programs have responded to the calls.
- All calls have been closed within two business days.
  - 62% of calls have been closed same day they were received.

Average time to complete a call



Number of voicemails per month



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Swim Beach Water Quality Program: a Highlight of Harmful Planktonic Algae Blooms and Benthic Algae Mats

Recreational Water Safety, Clark County Public Health

Maggie Palomaki, Environmental Health Specialist

May 21, 2025

Photo: Vancouver Lake 8/20/2024

What is a harmful algae bloom (HAB)?

Harmful algae blooms go by many names: planktonic blooms, blue-green algae, cyanobacteria, toxic algae, HABs, and CyanoHABs.

DEFINITION: a harmful algal bloom (HAB) is an overgrowth of algae in the water body that could affect water quality and aquatic life. Some HABs produced by bacteria can create **toxins** that may also harm people, animals, and the local environment. (CDC)

How they appear:

- Thick scums or “blooms” in the water from rapid cyanobacteria growth
- Thrive in warm, nutrient rich, slow-moving water
- Typically green, brown, red, or blue/teal
- Strong odor of decay

Round Lake 8/12/2024

Vancouver Lake 8/19/2024

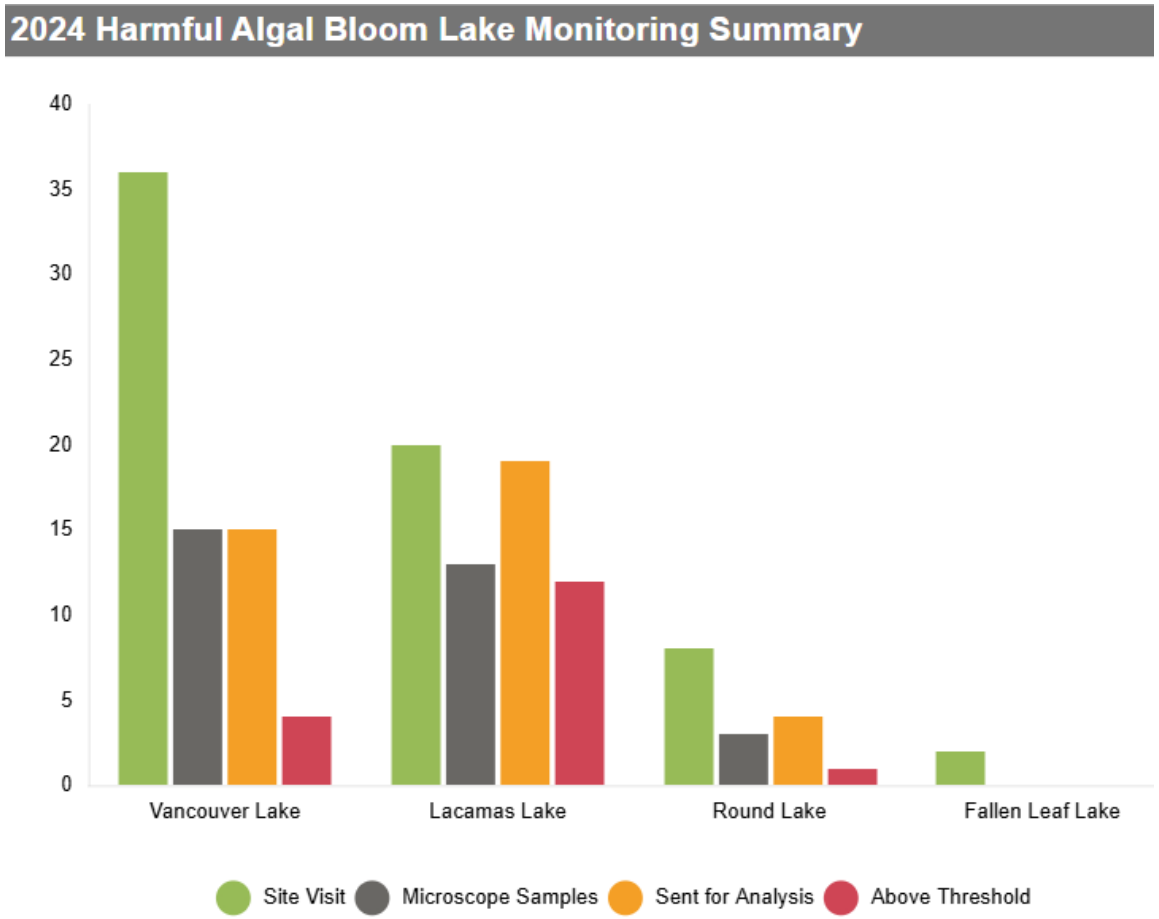
What Public Health does with harmful algae blooms

- Weekly site visits to areas prone to harmful algae blooms May-October.
- Investigations for water quality complaints, illnesses.
- If a bloom is present, a water sample is collected for laboratory toxin analysis in Seattle.
- Issue advisories when toxin levels exceed state-defined thresholds.
- Provide education to the public at events such as farmers markets, Camas Days, and lake cleanups.

Student Intern Hannah Sebby, Summer 2024, Vancouver Lake

CCPH Staff and student interns at outreach event summer 2024

2024 harmful algae monitoring by the numbers



Field Work

- 66+ site visits
- 38 water samples sent for toxin analysis
- 76 toxin tests (2 per sample)
- 17 tests above advisory threshold

Emerging topic in toxic algae: benthic algae mats

Planktonic algae blooms

- Monitored in Clark County since 2007.
- Mixed into the water column, collects in diffuse scums surface
- Often accumulates at or near shoreline.
- Reduces water clarity as bloom gets more dense
- Found in ponds, lakes and slow-moving water.

Lacamas Lake 10/10/2022

Benthic algae mats

- First tested in Clark County in 2024.
- Attached to the bottom in mats, blobs, or spires, or detached and floating in clumps.
- Can occur anywhere in a fast or slow-moving water body.
- Does not affect water clarity.
- Texture is slimy, gelatinous, slippery.

Provided by Benton-Franklin Health District

Both can produce potentially harmful levels of toxins!

Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

October 2024

- Dog death reported to Public Health after recreating on Ackerman Island, accessible by boat via the Columbia River.
- Dog had onset of tremors, salivation, stumbling, vomiting, and died at an emergency veterinarian office.
- The vet sent stomach sample and CCPH coordinated with WA DOH & King County Environmental Lab to test for cyanotoxins.
- High levels of *anatoxin-a* and *dihydro-anatoxin* were found in stomach contents, indicating **cyanotoxin poisoning as cause of the dog's death.**
- The dog's owner also experienced symptoms, such as numbness and tingling of the mouth, after providing rescue breaths but fully recovered.

Ackerman Island, Columbia River

Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

Key details

- Dog owner was well-informed of the dangers of harmful algae *blooms*.
- There was no visible algae bloom at the Port of Camas-Washougal, Columbia River, or Ackerman Island.
- At no point did the dog submerge himself or swim in the river (the dog did not like to be in water).
- Dog had plant-like material in their stomach at the time of death, believed to be a benthic algae mat.
- Site visit 11/9/24 found brown, mat-like material at the water line which was sent for toxin analysis.

Ackerman Island, Columbia River 11/9/2024

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Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

How did this happen?

- Benthic algae mats are not familiar to the general public.
- Prior to 2024, Public Health had not received reports of benthic mats in Clark County waters.
- CCPH's monitoring and education focus has been on planktonic blooms.
- What can we do differently?

Provided by Benton-Franklin Health District

Ackerman Island, Columbia River 11/9/2024

Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

Next steps

- Immediately posted temporary educational signage at all 11 marinas and boat launches on the Columbia River.
- Produce new educational materials and signage that addresses benthic algae.
- Adding information to our website about benthic mats and related illness incidents.
- Public Health staff have been learning and training on benthic mat monitoring.

Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

Coordinating across agencies

- Monthly meetings with CCPH, WA DOH, Oregon DEQ, and Oregon Health Authority to discuss advisory strategies.
- Oregon had a dog death in St. Helens area August 2024.
- Develop and review new signage and outreach materials to align messaging.
- Coordinating communication between state and local agencies.
- Identifying contact lists for future Columbia River concerns.

Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

Know before you go: Toxic algae mats

Do NOT let children or adults touch or eat algae mats or swallow water.

Do NOT let dogs eat algae mats or drink from the water.

Toxic benthic mats could look like these images. Photos provided by Benton Franklin Health District and Clark County Public Health.

Avoid clumps of brown, green, yellow, or red algae found in shallow water near the shore of rivers and lakes.

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Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

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Illness symptoms may occur in people and dogs within minutes to a few hours after contact.

Symptoms in people:

- Tingling
- Burning
- Drowsiness
- Salivating
- Difficulty speaking
- Vomiting and diarrhea

Symptoms in dogs:

- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Unconsciousness
- Weakness
- Disorientation
- Difficulty breathing
- Excessive salivation

People experiencing symptoms should **contact their health care provider** right away or **call Poison Control** at 1.800.222.1222.

Call an emergency veterinarian if your dog experiences symptoms or dies.

Report exposures and illnesses to health officials:

Washington
Clark County Public Health
dlcntyhealthwaterrec@clark.wa.gov
564.397.8428

Oregon
Oregon Health Authority
hab.health@odhsoha.oregon.gov
877.290.6767

Scan the QR code to learn more or to report an algae bloom or mat.

clark.wa.gov/public-health/public-beaches

For other formats, contact the Clark County ADA Office
564.397.2322 / 711 or 800.833.6388 / ADA@clark.wa.gov

Updated 4.25

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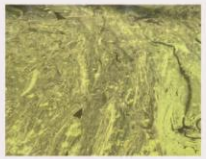
Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

What's the difference?
Algae mats vs. blooms

People recreating in water in Clark County may encounter harmful algae called cyanobacteria. Benthic algae mats are one kind of cyanobacteria that's been found in the Columbia River. Planktonic algae blooms are another type of cyanobacteria that are frequently found at Vancouver, Lacamas, and Round lakes.

While they look different, both types of cyanobacteria can be toxic to people and pets and should be avoided.

Mats (benthic)	Blooms (planktonic)
	
Does not affect water clarity.	Reduced water clarity as bloom gets more dense.
Found in fast- and slow-moving water.	Typically found in ponds, lakes, and slow-moving water.
Can be attached to bottom or detached and floating.	Mixed in water column; collects in scums on surface.
Can occur anywhere in water body.	Accumulates at or near shoreline.

Identifying benthic algae

Benthic algae grow below the surface of the water in mats. Typically, the mats are attached to the lakebed or riverbed on sand, silt, submerged wood or plants, or stones. But the mats can detach and float on the surface of the water or wash ashore.

Shape:

- Clumps
- Blobs
- Mats
- Spires

Color:

- Bright and dark greens
- Yellow
- Brown
- Orange
- Red

Texture:

- Slimy
- Gelatinous
- Slippery

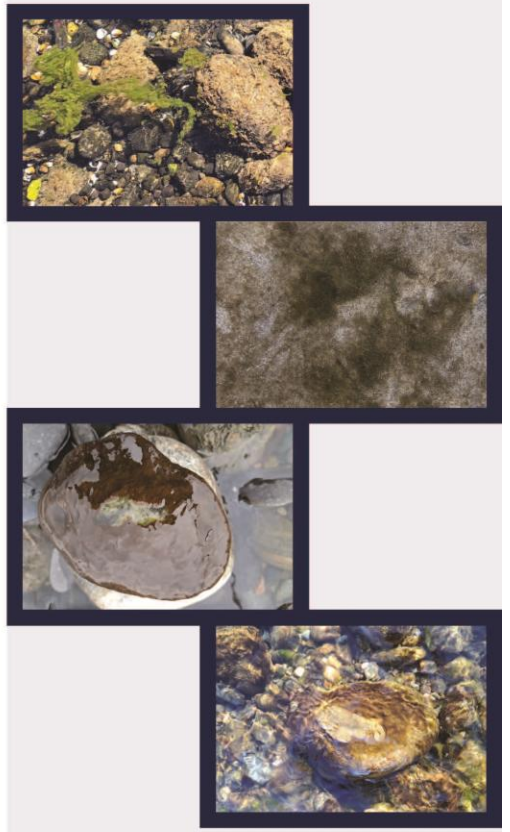
Smell:

- Possible foul odor

Scan the QR code below for a visual guide for identifying benthic algae mats.

shorturl.at/cQ47L

Toxic benthic mats could look like algae shown in these images



Photos provided by Benton Franklin Health District and Clark County Public Health.

Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

Staying safe

Cyanobacteria can produce several toxins that can affect the liver and nervous system. People and pets can get sick after being exposed to toxins.

People

People can be exposed through ingestion, inhalation, or skin contact.

People should avoid areas of mat or scum in the water and not touch, swallow or swim in areas that may have cyanobacteria.

People who are exposed to toxins may have these common symptoms: vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, headache, rashes, sore throat, fever, numbness, tingling, salivation, difficulty speaking.

Pets

Pets can be exposed by drinking the water, licking their fur or eating clumps of algae.

Dogs should not eat mats or scum, drink water or swim in water that may have cyanobacteria.

Dogs are especially susceptible to intoxication and may have these symptoms soon after being exposed: vomiting, foaming or excessive salivation, stumbling or loss of motor control. Sudden death may also occur.

Contact a health care provider, Poison Control at 1.800.222.1222, or emergency veterinarian right away if symptoms develop.

Report exposures and illnesses to health officials

Washington
Clark County Public Health
Recreational Water Safety
dlcntyhealthwaterrec@clark.wa.gov
564.397.8428

Oregon
Oregon Health Authority
hab.health@odhsoha.oregon.gov
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Scan the QR code below to learn more or to report an algae mat or bloom:

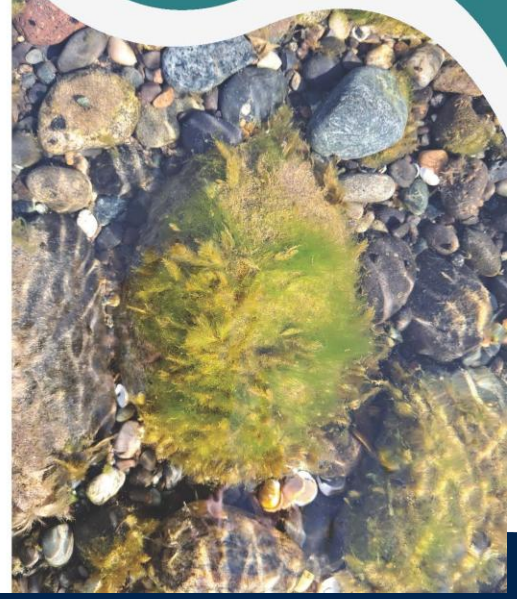
clark.wa.gov/public-health/public-beaches

Updated 4.25

For other formats, contact the Clark County ADA Office: 564.397.2322 / 711 or 800.833.6388 / ADA@clark.wa.gov

Toxic algae mats

(benthic cyanobacteria)



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Addressing benthic algae mat concerns

Ongoing challenges

- Columbia River is very big! ~40 miles of shoreline + islands.
- Toxin tests of water samples alone are not a good indicator of potential mat toxicity.
- King County Environmental Lab is not set up to routinely test algae mats.
- No defined toxicity thresholds for benthic mat advisories.
- Approach moving forward is primarily educational to the public.

Ackerman Island 11/9/2024

Clark County swim beach monitoring at present

Where we are now

- Continuing weekly monitoring and advisories for planktonic algae blooms.
- Investigate benthic algae mat complaints if there is a suspected human or animal illness and provide notice to the community.
- Targeted benthic algae mat education and outreach through social media, newsletters, website, community events.
- Ongoing conversations with governing agencies and lake partners.
- Adjust and evolve as we learn more.

Lacamas Lake 10/23/2023

Provided by Benton-Franklin Health District

Thank you!

Comments and questions

Recreational Water Safety team:
DLcntyhealthwaterrec@clark.wa.gov

Clark County Center for Community Health

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