

**MARBLE VALLEY HEALTHWORKS**

*Personalized Medical Practice*

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## BLUE GREEN ALGAE

Blue-Green Algae or Cyanobacteria are the oldest and simplest organisms that convert sunlight to energy as modern plants do. They are one of

the most abundant and widespread life forms on earth. Successful as they are, Cyanobacteria seldom get our attention, and that's usually when they are spoiling our fun at summer swimming holes.

Cyanobacteria are common in fresh and marine water bodies, including lakes and ponds in Vermont. Most of the time their concentrations are low and outside our everyday concern. Cyanobacteria thrive in warm, still water that is rich in nitrogen and phosphorus. When those elements combine in the summer and early fall, Blue Green algae populations can explode, forming "blooms" that are visible as soupy water or scum. Such blooms are common place in some bays of Lake Champlain, and are being reported more frequently on other Vermont lakes, including Chittenden Reservoir last August.

Besides looking bad, blooms are a health hazard and should be avoided. Some Cyanobacteria produce a variety of toxins that can irritate tissues they contact, such as the skin, nerves, liver and other organs. Some toxins must be ingested or inhaled to cause harm, but others only require direct contact as with swimming.

Dogs are at particular risk since they are more likely to drink contaminated water and can lick the algae from their coats long after they swim. A CDC study of 13 states found that Cyanobacteria blooms were responsible for more than 100 dog deaths between 2002 and 2012.

Cyanobacteria blooms are usually not difficult to identify due to the water's soupy green appearance or the presence of thick green or brown scum on the shore. Simply avoid contact with suspicious looking water and keep children and pets away as well. The State of Vermont monitors warmer bodies of water around the state and reports the presence and severity of cyanobacteria blooms on its website. The public is invited to report suspected blooms as well. <https://apps.health.vermont.gov/vtracking/bluegreenalgae/2016/d/>

While Blue-Green Algae blooms in Vermont are uncommon outside of Lake Champlain, biologists are noting an increase in the bodies of water impacted and recommend that anyone recreating around still water from June through September be vigilant. Increasing average temperatures (about one half a degree per decade since 1960 in VT), more precipitation (almost 10 more inches per year than in 1960) and more extreme weather (more precipitation per storm) are all likely to foster more Cyanobacteria blooms in the coming years.

## PROTECT YOUR SKIN!

Now that summer is here, we should all be reminded about melanoma prevention. Melanoma is the deadliest type of skin cancer and the incidence is increasing.

Those at the highest risk of developing melanoma include people with a previous melanoma, those with multiple atypical nevi, a strong family history of melanoma, and people with very sun sensitive skin.

The Academy of Dermatology promotes prevention of skin cancer by limiting the damaging effects of sun exposure. Here are some tips:

Apply sun screen when you are outside even if it is cloudy.

Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours but sooner if swimming or sweating.

Use sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays and that has a SPF of at least 30.

The amount of sunscreen needed to apply to the exposed areas of the body is one ounce. This is approximately the size of the palm of your hand.

Avoid the sun between 10 am and 2 pm when the rays are the strongest.

Consider long sleeve clothing, pants and a hat when outside.

Avoid tanning beds

Periodically check your skin and if you see a changing mole, please be seen.

Finally, there have been several studies linking aspirin use with a lowered risk of melanoma. In one study on post-menopausal women, the women who used aspirin had a significantly lower incidence of melanoma. In addition, the longer the aspirin was used the greater the preventative effect. Further studies are needed to verify this very interesting finding.

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## ARE YOU PLANNING INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL?

For those of you who love Apps, there is a travel App available from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). It is called TravWell. You can plan a trip by travel date and destination. The App gives vaccine and medication advice, and also includes a To Do list which helps you prepare before the trip. If you need help with packing, TravWell features a suggested packing list. In addition,

the App contains a Documents folder where you can upload any important travel documents, lists of medications or records of immunizations.

Important safety benefits of the App are the emergency services phone numbers for each destination, the updated U.S. State Department Alerts, and the Travel Health Notices. With one click, there is also a link to the CDC website which has expanded information about the chosen country. Have fun traveling and be safe.