



6 March 2015

Blue-green algae toxin research

The following statement may be attributed to Sophie Dwyer, Executive Director, Health Protection Unit, Department of Health.

The Department of Health is aware of the research being undertaken by Macquarie University in Sydney into toxins that may be associated with blue-green algae blooms in waterways.

The suggestion that toxins in blue-green algae blooms may be associated with motor neurone disease is theoretical only.

The Macquarie University researchers have indicated themselves this is a work in progress and much more research needs to be done.

Blue-green algae or cyanobacteria, most often associated with nutrient run-off, can produce a neurotoxic amino acid called beta-methylamino-L-alanine, or BMAA.

It is this BMAA that has been suggested as a possible link to motor neurone disease.

Motor neurone disease is a complex condition that is likely to have multiple contributing causes.

Blue-green algae toxins are generally susceptible to destruction by normal town drinking water treatment processes, including filtration and chlorination.

So long as Mount Isa town water supply is treated to meet Australian drinking water standards, it will remain safe to drink, even if there is blue-green algae in the source water before treatment.

All Queenslanders are reminded to be wary of drinking directly from rivers, streams and other water sources without ensuring the water is properly treated first.

These natural water sources may contain many different hazards – not just blue-green algae, but also animal waste and bacteria.

ENDS

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