

# Media Release - **DRAFT**

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## **WAIKATO SHALLOW LAKES CYANOBACTERIAL WARNING UPDATE**

The health warning has now been lifted from Lake Waahi, following the latest results from the six monitored shallow lakes. Only three of these lakes, Kainui, Whangape and Waikare, still have health warnings. Cell counts remain very high in Lake Waikare, at 2.9 million cells/ml.

In previous years, cell counts for some species of cyanobacteria have risen above the health warning level of 15,000 cells/ml in autumn, and continued caution is required.

“Waikato shallow lake users should always avoid contact with water which looks cloudy green or brown, or has scum forming even when there is no warning in place,” said Waikato District Health Board medical officer of health Dell Hood.

“Most lakes are not tested, and water users must consider the possibility of cyanobacterial blooms in any water body before they use it – at any time of year.”

Dr Hood reminds the public that test results should be used for general guidance only, as cyanobacteria and their toxins will not be evenly spread through any lake and may be concentrated in some areas by wind and water movements.

“During blooms, lakes should not be used for any activity which involves skin contact with the water,” she said.

“If people choose to do this, they should shower and change their clothing as soon as possible afterwards, even if no symptoms are noticeable.”

Swallowing water from lakes affected by blooms should also be avoided.

While not everyone will be affected, for some, the risks include rash, skin and eye irritation, allergy symptoms such as hayfever and asthma and possibly stomach upsets such as diarrhoea and vomiting.

These effects may not appear until some time after contact with the affected water.

The Population Health Service would like to be informed about any health problems which develop after exposure to any of the Waikato lakes. Informal feedback suggests that water users may at times experience transient rashes. These incidents, while not important to the individual but they could be early warnings of more significant problems. There could be irritants other than cyanobacteria present in the water. The Population Health Service would always like to hear from anyone who has experienced this sort of problem, to allow recording of location, time, the activity taking place, and how long the problem lasted. Minor health problems do not require medical care, so we rely on the public to keep us up to date with this information.

Up-to-date information on cyanobacterial cell counts is available from local councils and Environment Waikato.

Visit <http://www.ew.govt.nz/enviroinfo/water/healthyrivers/waikato/algalbloom/> for more information.

Health advice is available from the Public Health Unit (07) 839 8899 at all times.

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**About Waikato District Health Board and Health Waikato:**

**Waikato DHB** is responsible for planning, funding and providing quality health and disability support services for the 353,460 people living in the Waikato DHB region. It has an annual turnover of \$915 million and employs more than 5300 people.

**Health Waikato** is the DHB's main provider of hospital and health services with an annual budget of \$530 million and 4500 staff. It has seven divisions across five hospital sites, two maternity and continuing care hospitals and 21 community bases offering a comprehensive range of primary, secondary and tertiary health services.

Other Waikato DHB-funded health services - including primary health, pharmacies and community laboratories - are delivered by a wide range of independent providers.