



## PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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INTERIM COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

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### **Blue-Green Algal Blooms Persist;** *County Opens Beach for Affected Community Residents*

BREWSTER, NY— Blue-green algal blooms have dashed many summer plans this year. Dozens of repeated beach closures have disappointed residents who enjoy cooling off in their neighborhood lake on a hot and humid summer day. While funding is coming from New York State to research solutions for the long term, County Executive MaryEllen Odell has taken immediate steps to open the Putnam County beach in Veterans Memorial Park on Gypsy Trail Road in Kent, free of charge to those residents living in affected lake communities.

“We wanted to do something right now for our community members who are dealing with these algal blooms on a daily basis,” says County Executive Odell. “This is a difficult situation. The blooms pose a serious health problem. Swimming, and even boating, can put you at risk.”

“Our public county beach at Veterans Memorial Park has fortunately remained unaffected by the blue-green algal blooms that have plagued many other Putnam beaches,” says Christopher Ruthven, deputy commissioner of Parks and Recreation for Putnam County. “We’re open from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. until Labor Day, and for residents affected by the harmful algal blooms in their community lakes, the usual \$8 fee for a day pass is being waived.”

Odell adds, “Being able to use the beach at Veterans Memorial Park provides a silver lining to an unfortunate situation. At the park individuals and families can enjoy the swimming in the lake, relaxing on the beach, barbecuing, hiking the trails, visiting the Veterans Museum or admiring the Gold Star Mothers statue or the Military helicopter and tank.”

The increasing number of harmful algal blooms (HABs) in Putnam and around New York State is not completely understood. Staff at the Putnam County Department of Health have been busier than ever collecting and sending lake water samples for testing.

“We are working closely with town and beach personnel,” explains Michael Nesheiwat, MD, interim commissioner of health. “They are well-informed and able to quickly recognize these harmful algal blooms. When there is an overabundance, or bloom, of this cyanobacteria, the onsite personnel are able to shut down the beaches directly without a confirmatory visit by the health department. This is important as blooms can present a serious health hazard and these microscopic organisms are toxic to humans and animals if swallowed. At high levels, ingestion may cause nausea, diarrhea and vomiting, along with irritation of the skin, eyes, nose, throat, and respiratory tract.

“Needless to say, we are grateful to the County Executive who has stepped in to waive the park fee for residents in the affected communities,” continues Dr. Nesheiwat.

Toxic bacteria are naturally present in low numbers in lakes and streams. However, in warm, shallow, undisturbed surface water that gets a lot of sunlight, the bacteria can grow quickly and easily, creating a bloom. When this happens, floating scums on the water surface may appear, along with discolored water covering all or portions of a lake.

The Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH) continues to monitor the county’s 32 permitted bathing beaches, while also responding to calls from town, village and summer camp personnel. Blue-green algae can range in color from green, blue, brown, yellow, grey, or even red. Contact should be avoided with any discolored water, with or without a floating covering or unpleasant odor. When the

water clears, either naturally or by treatment, follow-up water testing must be conducted. Toxins can still be present even after the bloom looks like it has passed.

“After a satisfactory result on a water test, town and beach personnel can re-open the beach,” explains associate public health sanitarian Shawn Rogan. “And we work closely with the towns to reopen as soon as possible. The problem we are seeing more and more of is that the algae can ‘re-bloom’ shortly thereafter, making it necessary to close the beach once again.”

Some towns choose to apply an algaecide, but they have the same precautions as any pesticide. Treatment methods, if any, are strictly a town decision, and application of an algaecide requires approval by the Department of Environmental Conservation. Prevention efforts focus on ways to control the level of nutrients the algae receive. These include reducing plant fertilizer use, promoting efficient septic systems operations, and managing storm water. These tactics are supported by the DEC, but much is still unknown about the causes of HABs.

The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our County website at [www.putnamcountyny.com](http://www.putnamcountyny.com); or visit our social media sites on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth) and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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