

Chief Health Officer Advisory

8 February 2016

Status: Active

Algae in the Gippsland Lakes (*pseudonitzschia delicatissima*)

Status:	Active
Date issued:	8 February 2016
Issued by:	Dr Roscoe Taylor, Acting Chief Health Officer, Victoria
Issued to:	Health professionals

Key messages

- The Chief Health Officer has issued a notice advising against eating mussels and other shellfish from the Gippsland Lakes following detection of high levels of the algae, *Pseudonitzschia delicatissima* in a number of samples of water taken from the lakes.
- *Pseudonitzschia delicatissima* is not the same as blue-green algae.
- Under certain conditions, some forms of this algae may produce a toxin known as domoic acid. When present at high levels, this toxin may accumulate in mussels and other shellfish at a level potentially harmful to human health if consumed.
- Further testing is underway to confirm whether this toxin has been released so this advisory has been issued as a precautionary measure only.
- If the algal toxins are present in shellfish, consumers may develop gastroenteritis-like symptoms usually within 24 hours after consumption. In severe cases, neurological symptoms may develop.
- Take a food history for any patients presenting with these symptoms and if advice is required consult a medical toxicologist via the Victorian Poisons Information Centre 131126.

What is the issue?

Pseudonitzschia delicatissima is a diatom algae commonly found in coastal waters at low levels. Elevated algae levels were detected in the first week of February 2016. When stressed, the algae can release a toxin known as domoic acid. When this toxin is present at high levels, it is possible for this toxin to accumulate in shellfish at a level that may be potentially harmful to human health.

Who is at risk?

Should the presence of the toxin be identified in seafood samples, anyone who has consumed shellfish from the Gippsland Lakes from the beginning of February 2016 may be at risk. Vulnerable groups include young children, pregnant women and the elderly.



Symptoms and transmission

If patients have consumed mussels or shellfish containing the domoic acid toxin from the Gippsland Lakes, they may experience gastroenteritis-like symptoms (usually within 24 hrs of consumption) such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal cramps.

In severe cases, neurological symptoms may develop (usually within 48 hrs of consumption) such as headaches, confusion, short term memory loss (amnesic shellfish poisoning), respiratory difficulties and seizures.

Prevention/treatment

As a precautionary measure, consumers are advised not to eat shellfish from the Gippsland Lakes until further notice. There is no specific antidote and symptoms should be managed with supportive therapy until the toxin passes through the patients system.

If you believe one of your patients may have amnesic shellfish poisoning, please notify the Department of Health and Human Services on **1300 761 874** after organising appropriate clinical care.

More information

Clinical information

For specialist advice from a medical toxicologist contact the Victorian Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26. Department of Health and Human Services:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/researchandreports/Guidelines%20for%20the%20investigation%20of%20gastroenteritis>

Consumer information

Algae in the Gippsland Lakes Community Information:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/factsheets/Algae%20in%20the%20Gippsland%20Lakes%20Community%20information>

Gastroenteritis - Better Health Channel:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/gastroenteritis>

Yours sincerely



Dr Roscoe Taylor
Acting Chief Health Officer

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