



Last Update Friday, Aug 11, 2017

We want to share our full protocol for making sure that all of our participants are safe on swim day!

Safety Protocol for Women Swimmin' – Blue-Green Algae Risks

The presence of blue-green algae blooms, or harmful algae blooms (HAB), in Cayuga Lake has been identified as a potential health hazard for swimmers and has led to the temporary closing of local swimming beaches. This agency protocol sets out the process for determining whether, in the interest of safety and prudence, the presence of blue-green algae is sufficient to require the cancellation of the swimming portion of our event.

The process is as follows:

1. Agency staff will monitor information about lake conditions in the weeks preceding the event to learn of any reports of harmful algae blooms (HABs). Sources of information include local media, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the local state parks offices, the Ithaca Yacht Club and the Tompkins County Department of Health (TCDOH).
2. If that information indicates any meaningful potential for health risks caused by the presence of HAB, agency staff will keep the safety committee advised and will, as appropriate, continuously notify swimmers, boaters and volunteers of any algae situation that may necessitate changes to the plans for the event.
3. Agency staff will remain in contact with TCDOH, which formally does not regulate the Women Swimmin' event. However, Hospicare commits to remain in compliance with TCDOH recommendations to minimize to the greatest extent possible the risk of swimmers', boaters' or volunteers' exposure to HABs. Those recommendations are incorporated in the steps outlined below.
4. If HABs are actively present at or near the course within 72 hours of the event, the swimming portion of the event will be cancelled and, to the extent possible, alternative arrangements for a celebration (not involving lake swimming) will be planned.
5. Notice of the cancellation and changes to the event plan will be provided to all affected persons as soon as feasible following a determination of active HABs that require cancellation of the swimming part of the event.
6. The agency will arrange to have volunteers from the Finger Lakes Watershed Network (specifically, those identified as trained observers and who are knowledgeable about HABs and able to identify suspicious blooms) perform a visual inspection of the swim course on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the event, and if there is finding of an active HAB risk at either of those times, the agency will proceed in accordance with item 5 above.

7. As early as possible on the Saturday morning of the swim (and before anyone starts swimming or boating), the entire swimming course will be surveyed by the trained observers by boat or kayak. The observers will notify the safety team at the earliest possible time of their findings and, based on those findings and in accordance with this protocol, a determination will be made as to whether the swimming event can safely proceed. The ultimate question to be answered by the observers is whether there is any detected presence of HABs on the course. (The safety committee will also monitor weather, wave, wind and water conditions and the cancellation of the swimming part of the event will remain an option based on observed conditions and any related safety concerns.)
8. If there is no presence of HABs reported by the observers to the safety team, notice will be provided by the safety team to the volunteers coordinating the swimmers and boaters, and the process for conducting the swimming event will begin as planned. If the observers' report indicates any presence of HABs on the course, notice of that finding will be given to the safety team and all affected persons will be advised that no swimming or boating will be permitted or sanctioned by Hospicare for the event.
9. As indicated in point 4, if HABs are found on the morning of the event, necessitating the cancellation of the swim, alternative arrangements for a celebration (not involving lake swimming) will be planned.
10. Throughout the weeks preceding the event all swimmers and boaters will be kept apprised by agency staff of the HAB risks and will be assured that no swimmer, boater or volunteer is required to participate by virtue of registration with Hospicare for the event. All swimmers, boaters and volunteers will be absolutely free, and encouraged, to base any participation in the event on their own assessment of risk and their own personal preferences regarding participation.

Adopted by Hospicare and Women Swimmin' August 2017.

Last Update Monday, Aug 7, 2017

We Have Good News!

According to the NY Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the southern end of Cayuga Lake has had no recorded sightings of harmful algae blooms (HAB) since last week. Reports from trained observers with the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network also indicate our lake is looking much better than it did a week ago!

The drop-off in sightings of blue-green algae blooms and the favorable weather conditions are good indicators. We have consulted with the Tompkins County Department of Health (TCDOH), the DEC and our insurance carrier to determine how to proceed with our planning. Both the TCDOH and the NYS DEC suggested that we proceed with our planning, however, they recommend that we do a visual inspection of the swim course on Saturday before starting the event. Our insurance provider advised us that we must follow that recommendation.

So, with additional safety protocols in place, our plans for a swim across Cayuga Lake on Saturday are continuing! Currently the southern end of Cayuga Lake has no recorded sightings of HABs, but we realize that this is no guarantee that the water will be clear of them on swim day.

The Cayuga Watershed Network is helping Women Swimmin' by recruiting from their team of trained observers who will inspect the swim course both before and on the morning of the swim. Obviously, the inspection on Saturday can't happen before sunrise. Long-time Women Swimmin' participants and supporters know that a fair amount of set-up and getting ready happens before dawn! To accommodate an adequate

visual inspection of lake conditions, we need to shift the start of the event to one hour later. Please visit the [Event Details](#) page of the Women Swimmin' website for more information on the new timeline.

By complying with the suggested recommendations, we are doing our best to get the most up-to-date information around HABs. We will also receive detailed weather updates from Cornell Meteorology later in the week and the morning of the swim. This support and guidance from our local experts helps us ensure the safety of all our participants. We're grateful for the support of our community in coming together to make Women Swimmin' for Hospicare happen!

We understand some swimmers, boaters, or volunteers may not be comfortable coming in contact with the lake water, even with this protocol in place. We recognize that you all must make choices based on your own health and comfort levels, and if you feel you need to cancel please let us know as soon as possible so we are not looking for you on swim day. Also, if the change in schedule means you're not available, please let us know.

We appreciate your support and patience as we continue to work through this together!

Thursday Aug 3, 2017

Working in hospice requires a grounded approach to life. If there's anything our Hospicare team—and the patients they support—know it's that life is unpredictable and unexpected changes mean that plans need to be adjusted. Our Women Swimmin' team has learned over the last 14 years that this also applies to our event. We can't control the Lake or the weather; we can only adjust to what happens and make sure we have back-up plans as things change.

For this year's Women Swimmin', one of those unexpected changes is the presence of blue-green algae blooms across Cayuga Lake (also known as harmful algae bloom or HAB). This situation has necessitated the temporary closure of some local Lake swimming spots. Many Women Swimmin' participants, volunteers and other supporters have been asking what this means for Women Swimmin' for Hospicare.

The health and safety of all our swimmers, boaters and volunteers is always our highest priority. Please be assured that we've been following the HAB situation closely and have sought the guidance and advice of experts, including the Tompkins County Department of Health. As the day of the Lake swim approaches, our plans for Women Swimmin' will be based on what those experts tell us about lake conditions. The reality is the presence of toxic algae is an extremely serious health concern and conditions in the Lake can change rapidly, for better or for worse.

We know that our participants all worked hard to train and fundraise in anticipation of crossing the Lake. Many participate in this event because Hospicare helped care for someone they love, and crossing the Lake can be a memorial to that loved one. We recognize these heartfelt connections and will do what we can to continue to make Women Swimmin' for Hospicare a celebration of life and community.

Many of our swimmers, boaters and volunteers will travel from out of town for the event. Our sponsors, vendors and other partners implement various plans and purchases to be ready for the Swim. In deference to all involved, we feel it's best to make a decision sooner rather than later. On Monday, August 7, we will see what the DEC, the NY State Department of Health and the Tompkins County Department of Health tell us about lake conditions in the southern part of Cayuga Lake (south of Taughannock Falls State Park). A decision to go ahead with the swim or not will be based on that information and made jointly by: Hospicare's executive director, the head of the Women Swimmin' Safety Committee, a representative of our event insurer and a member of the Hospicare Board of Directors.

We will post an update on the event website www.womenswimmin.org, and on our [Women Swimmin' Facebook page](#) by the end of the day on Monday, August 7.

If it's not safe to swim in the Lake, we will gather at 7 a.m. at Cass Park, for music, food, and fun. Women Swimmin' has always been an amazing celebration of community and life itself and that continues no matter what.