

What is a Harmful Algal Bloom?

A harmful algal bloom is usually a very small part of the normal phytoplankton blooms that are a common and essential phenomenon in the ocean. Blooms are caused by many different kinds of microscopic plants that float in the upper, sunlit layers of the water. When large numbers of colored phytoplankton are concentrated in one area, the color of the water may change. Other times a large bloom will not affect the color of the water at all. The dangerous cells in our area do not discolor the water, thus the term “red tide” is entirely false for Alaska. Large healthy blooms are part of every summer in our thriving oceans. Fortunately, these are only toxic for certain organisms, including humans, some of the time.

