For Immediate Release

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Update for Algal Toxins in Driskels Lake, Cass County – People and pets should stay out of water with accumulations of algae or aquatic plants.

The Van Buren/Cass District Health Department, working in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), is issuing an update to the June 26th public health advisory regarding algal toxins that were found in Driskels Lake in Cass County. Since the previous advisory, additional testing at the MDHHS Laboratory shows that toxin continues to be present in areas of Driskels Lake, specifically among clumps of algae. These toxins can make people and animals sick when swallowed or breathed in.

At this time, the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department advises that people and pets stay out of water that contains visible accumulations of algae or aquatic plants. People and pets could accidentally swallow water containing toxins when swimming in these areas. If people have any doubts whether algae is present in an area, they should stay out and keep pets out of the water. Do not let dogs drink lake water. Monitor children and pets closely to ensure they do not eat or play with algae or aquatic plants in the water or on the shoreline. If people and dogs enter the lake, rinse them off and monitor for illness. Boating or jet skiing through areas with algae or aquatic plants on the water’s surface can cause sprays that may contain the toxin and should be avoided.

Anatoxin-a was detected by the MDHHS laboratory in samples from Driskels Lake taken on June 19 and June 26. This is one of the algal toxins that cyanobacteria, or Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), can produce. Animals, including dogs, are especially at risk of developing health effects. This is because dogs are more likely than humans to be exposed to the toxins because they drink lake water and lick lake water from their fur. Symptoms of exposure in dogs can include lethargy, difficulty breathing and walking, and seizures. This toxin has been associated with dog deaths in other lakes.

EGLE is collecting additional samples from the lake today, July 1. The MDHHS laboratory will test these samples for algal toxins. The results of these tests are expected the week of July 6. The Van Buren/Cass District Health Department will use these testing results to provide any further updates, if needed. If people may have had contact with or swallowed water and feel sick, they should consult with their doctor or Poison Control at 800-222-1222. If symptoms are severe, people should get emergency medical attention. If animals become sick after contact with lake water, contact your veterinarian immediately.

More information on harmful algal blooms can be found at www.michigan.gov/habs and www.vbcassdhd.org.