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News Release

Health Canada announces results of blue - green algal products testing - only Spirulina found Microcystin - free

OTTAWA - Results of Health Canada's market survey testing of blue-green algal products show that no microcystins were detected in products made from only one type of blue-green algae, Spirulina blue-green algae, which is generally harvested from controlled ponds.

However, testing indicates that for many non-Spirulina blue-green algal products, harvested from natural lakes, consumption according to manufacturer's directions results in a daily intake of microcystins above that considered acceptable by Health Canada and the World Health Organization. Microcystins are toxins which accumulate in the liver and can cause liver damage. They are naturally produced by some kinds of blue-green algae. Blue-green algal products are sold in tablet, capsule, or powder forms as food supplements, often as a natural source of minerals.

Health Canada began its broad sampling of blue-green algal products available on the Canadian market in May 1999, after several blue-green algal products were found to contain unacceptable levels of microcystins. Analytical testing was then performed to measure the levels of microcystins in the blue-green algal products, and the level of risk to Canadian consumers was determined. Based on the results, products made only from Spirulina blue-green algae are no longer considered a microcystin-related health risk.

For non-Spirulina blue-green algal products, follow-up will be done on a case by case basis. Health Canada's Food Directorate has communicated the test results and their health significance to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and has indicated that products on the Canadian market, when consumed according to manufacturers directions, should not exceed the daily intake of microcystins considered acceptable by the World Health Organization and Health Canada. Subsequent compliance measures are the responsibility of the CFIA.

Health Canada recommends that children not be given products containing the non-Spirulina blue-green algae until measures to address any risk have been implemented. Because of their lower body weight, children are at greater risk of developing serious illness from blue-green algal products containing elevated levels of microcystins, especially if these products are ingested for an extended period of time.

Despite recent reports that blue-green algal products can be used as a treatment for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Health Canada has not received any evidence to support such claims, and has not authorized the

marketing of any blue-green algal products for any therapeutic purpose. In Canada, the blue-green algal products examined to date are sold as foods, and Health Canada does not allow therapeutic claims for substances sold as foods.

Adult consumers who choose to use products containing non-Spirulina blue-green algae should do so for short periods of time only. Adverse symptoms from long-term use of these products (weeks to months) may not be obvious but could range from a feeling of general malaise or gastro-intestinal discomfort, to jaundice. Concerned consumers should contact their health care professionals for advice.

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