

# SARGASSUM



Sargassum is large brown seaweed (a type of algae) that floats in island-like masses and never attaches to the seafloor. It can wash up on Florida beaches, the Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean islands. As it decomposes, it releases a substance called hydrogen sulfide, which has an unpleasant odor, similar to rotten eggs.

Although the seaweed is not a toxin-producing algae and will not harm your health, tiny sea creatures living in Sargassum may cause skin irritations.

Learn more about Sargassum—what it is, how it could impact your health, and how to protect yourself and others from possible health effects.

## What is Sargassum?

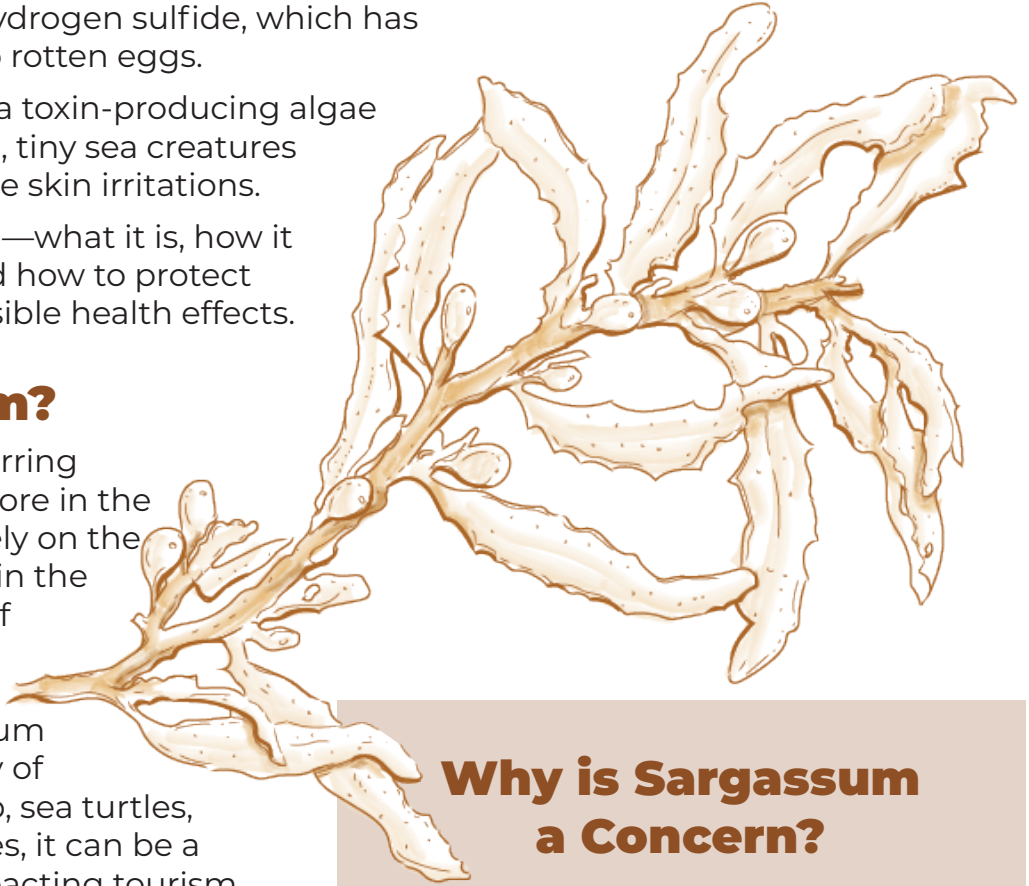
Sargassum is a naturally occurring seaweed that originates offshore in the Atlantic Ocean and floats freely on the ocean surface. It is abundant in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. In recent years, large quantities have come inshore on Florida's beaches. Sargassum provides a habitat for an array of animals such as crabs, shrimp, sea turtles, and fish but in large quantities, it can be a nuisance and an eyesore, impacting tourism and recreational enjoyment of beaches.

## Why Does Sargassum Smell?

When washed ashore, the decomposition of Sargassum seaweed causes the production of hydrogen sulfide gas, that smells like rotten eggs.

## Can Hydrogen Sulfide Impact My Health?

Hydrogen sulfide can cause eye, nose, and throat irritation, but generally other health effects are not expected. You may be more sensitive to hydrogen sulfide if you have asthma or other breathing ailments, and may experience difficulty breathing.



## Why is Sargassum a Concern?

- The tiny sea creatures that live in Sargassum may irritate skin with direct contact.
- Decomposing Sargassum causes an unpleasant smell due to the release of hydrogen sulfide gas.
- While people with prior respiratory conditions may be more sensitive to the hydrogen sulfide gas, in open areas, like beaches, the general public should not experience any adverse health impacts. Sensitive populations should consider taking precautions to minimize their exposure.



## **Does Sargassum Cause Skin Rashes and Blisters?**

Sargassum itself does not sting or cause rashes. However, tiny organisms that live in Sargassum (like jellyfish larvae) may irritate the skin if you come into contact with it.

## **Can I Cook or Eat Sargassum?**

No. You should not use Sargassum in cooking because it may contain high levels of heavy metals like arsenic and cadmium.

## **How Can I Protect Myself and My Family From Exposure to Sargassum?**

- Always supervise children at the beach.
- Avoid touching or swimming near seaweed. Organisms that live in the seaweed may sting and cause skin irritation.
- Use gloves if you must handle seaweed.
- Avoid areas where Sargassum is present if you have asthma or other respiratory issues.
- Close windows and doors if you live near the beach.

## **Can Hydrogen Sulfide From Sargassum Cause Cancer or Other Long-Term Health Impacts?**

Hydrogen sulfide is not known to cause cancer in humans. People with prior respiratory conditions may be more sensitive and can experience distressed breathing.

## **Learn More About Sargassum**

- Sargassum is common in the Sargasso Sea, a region of the North Atlantic Ocean that is surrounded by four currents and no land.
- Florida has no regulatory guidelines for exposure to hydrogen sulfide at the beach since it is not expected to harm health.
- Odors from most substances in outdoor air are not at levels that can harm your health.
- If workers are collecting and transporting Sargassum, they should wear personal protective equipment, such as gloves, boots, and gas filter half masks.