

# DON'T SPREAD DIDYMO



Photo: Stu Sutherland, Fish and Game

## Background

*Didymosphenia geminata* (didymo) was first identified in New Zealand in October 2004. It has since been found in multiple rivers in the South Island.

Didymo is not known to be present in the North Island.

Its arrival in New Zealand is the first recorded occurrence in the southern hemisphere. Its natural distribution is the northern part of the northern hemisphere.

Didymo is not considered a significant human health risk.

## Description

Didymo is a freshwater diatom (type of alga). It can form massive blooms on the bottoms of streams, rivers and occasionally on lake edges where there is wave action.

The alga attaches itself to the streambed by stalks. These stalks can form a thick brown mat that smothers rocks, submerged plants and other materials. Established mats form flowing streamers that can turn white at their ends and look similar to tissue paper.

Although the algae appears slimy, it feels like wet cotton wool.

## Stop the spread

Didymo is made up of cells that cannot be seen with the naked eye until large colonies form. It only takes one of these cells to survive and be transported to a nearby waterway for didymo to spread. Didymo cells thrive in freshwater and if you are cleaning with freshwater you are helping to keep them alive.

Didymo is an unwanted organism under the Biosecurity Act 1993. Under the Act those knowingly spreading an unwanted organism can be liable for up to five years' imprisonment and/or a \$100,000 fine.

To ensure you do not spread didymo, wherever possible restrict equipment, boats, clothing and other items for exclusive use in a single waterway.

If you are moving items between waterways you must:

1. **Check:** Before leaving the river, remove all obvious clumps of algae and look for hidden clumps. Leave them at the affected site. If you find any later, do not wash them down drains. Treat them with the approved cleaning methods below, dry them and put them in a rubbish bin.
2. **Clean:** Soak and scrub all items for at least one minute in either, hot (60°C) water, a two percent solution of household bleach or a five percent solution of salt, nappy cleaner, antiseptic hand cleaner or dishwashing detergent. A two percent solution is 200ml, a five percent solution is 500ml (two large cups), with water added to make 10 litres.
3. **Dry:** If cleaning is not practical, after the item is completely dry to touch, wait an additional 48 hours before contact or use in any other waterway.

## THE THREAT

Didymo is an invasive species that can form massive blooms. Thick growths can adversely affect freshwater fish, plant and invertebrate species by reducing the number of suitable habitats.



If you require more information please visit:

[www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo)

To report a suspected find of didymo please call 0800 80 99 66

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