



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

VIRGINIA PRESSLER, MD
DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 13, 2016

16-030

JOINT TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED TO COMBAT RAT LUNGWORM DISEASE IN HAWAII

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) and the East Hawaii Liaison to the Office of the Governor announced today the establishment of a Joint Task Force to assess the threat of rat lungworm disease (*Angiostrongylus*) in Hawaii. The mission of the task force is to share scientific knowledge in the application of diagnostics, treatment, mitigation and public education activities.

Rat lungworm disease is caused by a nematode, which is a roundworm parasite called *Angiostrongylus cantonensis*. The parasitic nematode can be passed from the feces of infected rodents to snails, slugs and certain other animals, which become intermediate hosts for the parasite. Humans can become infected when they consume, either intentionally or otherwise, infected raw or undercooked intermediate hosts.

Although rat lungworm has been found throughout the state, Hawaii Island has a majority of the cases. Some infected people don't show any symptoms or only have mild symptoms. For others, the symptoms can be much more severe, which can include headaches, stiffness of the neck, tingling or painful feelings in the skin or extremities, low-grade fever, nausea, and vomiting. Sometimes, a temporary paralysis of the face may also be present, as well as light sensitivity. This infection can also cause a rare type of meningitis (eosinophilic meningitis).

"Establishing a joint task force with local experts in the medical field and leaders in government will produce a set of best practices that be used to target rat lungworm disease not only on Hawaii Island, but on a statewide scale as well," said Wil Okabe, East Hawaii Liaison to the

Office of the Governor. “There is no specific treatment yet identified for this disease, so finding the best ways to prevent its spread and educate the public is crucial.”

The members of the task force are as follows:

- Wil Okabe (Facilitator), East Hawaii Governor’s Liaison Office
- Robert Cowie, Ph.D., Pacific Biosciences Research Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa
- Robert Hollingsworth, Ph.D., U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Sue Jarvi, Ph.D., School of Pharmacy, University of Hawaii at Hilo
- Jerry Kahana, Hawaii State Department of Agriculture
- Kenton Kramer, Ph.D., Department of Tropical Medicine, John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM)
- John Martell, M.D., Hilo Medical Center
- Marian Melish, M.D., Pediatric Infectious Disease, Kapiolani Medical Center
- Donn Mende, Research and Development, County of Hawaii
- DeWolfe Miller, Ph.D., Tropical Medicine Microbiology and Pharmacology, JABSOM
- Peter Oshiro, Sanitation Branch, DOH
- Sarah Park, M.D., F.A.A.P., State Epidemiologist, DOH
- Joanna Seto, Save Drinking Water Branch, DOH
- Aaron Ueno, Hawaii District Health Office, DOH
- Chris Whelen, Ph.D., State Laboratories Division, DOH
- Jonnie Yates, M.D., Kaiser Permanente

###