



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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17-040

**HAWAII STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
TO HOLD RAT LUNGWORM PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING
AT MITCHELL PAUOLE COMMUNITY CENTER ON MOLOKA'I**

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH), Maui District Health Office, will hold a public informational meeting on rat lungworm disease on Tuesday, May 30, 2017 at the Mitchell Pauole Community Center on Moloka'i from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. The meeting will include an opportunity for the public to ask questions.

A number of public health experts and community partners will be present to share their findings and recommendations on preventing the spread of rat lungworm, including Lorrin W. Pang, M.D., Maui District Health Officer; Sara Routley, Health Educator; Alton Arakaki from the University of Hawai'i's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR); Harmonee Williams of Sust'aina-ble Moloka'i; and Lori Buchanan from the Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i.

Rat lungworm is a rare disease caused by the parasite *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* which is found in rats, slugs and snails. The disease affects the brain and spinal cord and occurs when a person ingests raw or undercooked snails or slugs or unwashed raw produce such as leafy greens. To date, DOH has confirmed 15 cases of the illness in Hawai'i for 2017, including nine (9) from Hawai'i Island, four (4) Maui residents and two (2) Maui visitors.

DOH has launched a number of initiatives to address rat lungworm. Together with partner agencies, community meetings have been held across Maui to educate the public on rat lungworm and to share best practices on the prevention of this disease, including the proper

care and washing of produce, as well as rodent and slug control. DOH food safety inspectors have also worked with permitted food establishments on hygiene and food preparation, and medical advisories were sent to physicians and hospitals to increase awareness of the disease. DOH is planning future public information efforts to educate residents and visitors about rat lungworm.

The informational meeting on Moloka'i is also supported by Rosie Davis from Huli Au Ola Area Health Education Center (AHEC); Maui Mayor Alan Arakawa and staff; Luana Alcon from the Maui County Parks & Recreation-Moloka'i District; Margaret Makekau and DOH staff-Moloka'i Office; State Senator J. Kalani English; and State Representative Lynn DeCoite.

Please call the AHEC at (808) 646-9037 or the DOH Maui District Health Office at (808) 984-8201 for more information on the meeting.

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