



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

VIRGINIA PRESSLER, M.D.
DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 27, 2017

17-077

Hawaii Department of Health confirms seventeenth case of rat lungworm disease in Hawaii for 2017

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) has confirmed an additional case of rat lungworm disease in an infant from the Puna District of Hawaii Island. This is the tenth laboratory-confirmed case of rat lungworm disease contracted on Hawaii Island this year, bringing the statewide total to 17 cases in 2017. After a detailed investigation, DOH learned the infant became infected likely after accidentally consuming a slug or snail.

“This is an extremely unfortunate incident, with the infant currently hospitalized and receiving care,” said Aaron Ueno, Hawaii Island District Health Officer. “While the department is unable to provide specific information on this individual case, we can take this time to remind parents and caregivers about the importance of preventing infants and young children from putting slugs, snails, or other items in their mouths. We know that slugs, snails, and rats in all counties carry the parasite that can cause rat lungworm disease, so watching over young children is especially important.”

He added, “The Hawaii Island District Health Office is making a concerted effort to reach parents and caregivers of infants and young children by providing education and resources about rat lungworm disease prevention to our Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Early Intervention Services clients and our partners, including pediatricians and other healthcare providers.”

DOH recommends all parents and caregivers of infants and young children take extra precautions, including:

- Watch infants, toddlers, and children carefully while they are playing and make sure they are not picking up slugs, snails, or other objects from the ground and putting those into their mouths.
- Help children properly wash their hands after playing and/or on the ground using running water and soap.
- When consuming food and drinks, close and seal containers when not in use to prevent slugs and snails from crawling inside, especially when left on or near the ground.

The public is urged to take the following precautions to prevent rat lungworm disease:

- Carefully inspect, wash, and store produce in sealed containers, regardless of whether it came from a local retailer, farmer's market, or backyard garden.
- All fruits and vegetables should be washed and rubbed under running water, especially leafy greens, to remove any tiny slugs or snails.
- Controlling snail, slug, and rat populations is one of the most important steps in fighting the spread of rat lungworm disease. Eliminate slugs, snails, and rats around properties, and especially around home gardens.
- Farmers as well as food handlers and processors should increase diligence in controlling slugs, snails, and rats on the farm.

Rat lungworm disease (angiostrongyliasis) is contracted when a person becomes infected with the parasite *Angiostrongylus cantonensis*. This happens when a person accidentally consumes raw or undercooked infected slugs, snails, freshwater shrimp, land crabs or frogs. The most common symptoms include severe headaches and neck stiffness, but symptoms may vary widely among cases. The most serious cases experience neurological problems, pain, and severe disability.

More information about the signs and symptoms of rat lungworm disease may be found at http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/rat-lungworm-angiostrongyliasis/ and https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2017/01/RLD-rackcard-version1_06152017.pdf. The first in a series of public service announcements about rat lungworm disease prevention is posted on the Hawaii Department of Agriculture's website at <http://hdoa.hawaii.gov/blog/main/rat-lungworm-information/>.

#