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Hawaii Department of Health confirms first case of rat lungworm disease on Oahu in 2018

HONOLULU – The Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) has confirmed a case of rat lungworm disease in a toddler from Central Oahu. The child became ill earlier this month and was hospitalized. DOH conducted a detailed investigation and laboratory results confirmed evidence of the rat lungworm disease parasite (*Angiostrongylus cantonensis*) in the child's spinal fluid. This is the first confirmed case of rat lungworm disease contracted on Oahu this year and the fourth confirmed case statewide in 2018.

“Young children explore the world around them by putting things in their mouths as a natural part of their early development,” said Health Director Dr. Virginia Pressler. “As parents and caregivers, we can help ensure their safety by being mindful of where our children play and what they may be putting in their mouths. The risk of rat lungworm disease exists statewide and we can all take steps to help prevent it by working together to reduce the risks in our own communities.”

DOH provides the following recommendations to prevent rat lungworm disease:

- Inspect, wash and store produce in sealed containers, regardless of whether it came from a local retailer, farmer's market, or backyard garden.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables under clean, running water to remove any tiny slugs or snails. Pay close attention to leafy greens.
- Control snail, slug, and rat populations around homes, gardens and farms. Get rid of them safely by using traps and baits, and always wear gloves for safety.

For more information about rat lungworm disease and how to prevent its spread, visit:

- DOH website: http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/rat-lungworm-angiostrongyliasis/
- HDOA website: <http://hdoa.hawaii.gov/blog/main/rat-lungworm-information/>
- CTAHR website: <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/farmfoodsafety/rat-lungworm/>
- CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/angiostrongylus/index.html>

Angiostrongyliasis, commonly known as rat lungworm disease, is caused by a parasitic roundworm and can have debilitating effects on an infected person's brain and spinal cord. In Hawaii, most people become ill by accidentally ingesting a snail or slug infected with the parasite *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* (*A. cantonensis*). Symptoms vary widely between cases, and the most common ones include severe headaches and neck stiffness. The most serious cases experience neurological problems, severe pain, and long-term disability.

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