



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hawai'i Department of Health confirms state's fifth case of rat lungworm disease in 2018

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) has confirmed a case of rat lungworm disease in a toddler from East Hawai'i. Laboratory results confirmed evidence of the rat lungworm disease parasite (*Angiostrongylus cantonensis*) in the child's spinal fluid. This is the third confirmed case of rat lungworm disease contracted on Hawai'i Island this year and the fifth confirmed case statewide in 2018.

The child became ill in late July and was seen in a local emergency room last week. From there, the patient was hospitalized and transferred to O'ahu for further case management. The child spent several days in the hospital and was discharged upon improvement of their symptoms. Disease investigators with DOH are in the process of conducting a detailed investigation to learn more about the patient and possible sources of infection.

"Our children move quickly and are naturally curious about the world around them, which is a normal part of their early development," said Aaron Ueno, Hawai'i Island District Health Officer. "We can reduce the risk of rat lungworm disease by controlling slugs and snails around our homes and gardens, and by keeping children away from these harmful vectors as much as possible. The risk of rat lungworm disease exists statewide, and we can work together to take steps to prevent it in our communities."

DOH provides the following recommendations to prevent rat lungworm disease:

- Control snail, slug, and rat populations around homes, gardens and farms. Get rid of these vectors safely by clearing debris where they might live, and also using traps and baits. Always wear gloves for safety when working outdoors.
- 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.

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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