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**DOH AND CDC INVESTIGATE INVASIVE GROUP A STREPTOCOCCAL
(IGAS) INFECTIONS IN WEST HAWAII'**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HONOLULU — The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) and Hawai'i District Health Office are working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to investigate a report of high rates of a serious bacterial infection called invasive Group A *Streptococcus* (iGAS) in West Hawai'i.

This investigation began after a local physician identified a higher-than-expected number of patients with iGAS over a period of several months and informed DOH. While DOH routinely monitors these infections, historically Hawai'i has had higher rates than the national average. This investigation will help determine whether the number of people with iGAS is increasing in West Hawai'i and better understand possible causes and risk factors of this infection.

The goals of this investigation are to confirm whether there is an increase in the number of people with iGAS in West Hawai'i, identify risk factors, evaluate disease reporting, and better understand how infections may be occurring in the community. Investigators will also compare local trends with other areas of the state and analyze laboratory data to identify any patterns among people with iGAS infections.

Group A *Streptococcus* bacteria are commonly found on the skin or in the throat and often do not cause an infection. When infections do occur, they are usually mild illnesses such as strep throat or skin infection. In rare cases, the bacteria can enter the bloodstream or other normally sterile parts of the body. This is called invasive Group A *Streptococcus* (iGAS), which can be serious. Early treatment with antibiotics is effective, especially when care is given promptly.

Some people are at higher risk for severe illness. These include older adults and individuals with chronic medical conditions such as heart, kidney, or respiratory disease and diabetes. People with weakened immune systems, those with open wounds or skin infections — and people experiencing homelessness or who inject drugs may also be at increased risk. In addition, recent viral infections such as influenza or chickenpox can increase one's risk. The specific causes of the elevated iGAS illnesses in West Hawai'i are not yet known, so DOH and CDC are investigating.

DOH encourages the public to take simple steps to reduce the risk of infection. Keep cuts and wounds clean and covered until they heal and wash hands regularly with soap and water. Seek medical care if a wound becomes red, swollen, warm, or produces pus. Anyone experiencing fever, severe pain, or rapidly worsening symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

DOH and CDC are working closely with healthcare providers and community partners and will continue to provide updates as more information becomes available. At this time, the overall risk to the public is low; however, awareness and early treatment are important to prevent severe iGAS illness.

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