



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**News Release**

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GOVERNOR

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ADVISES PUBLIC TO WASH PRODUCE  
THOROUGHLY TO PREVENT EXPOSURE TO  
RARE FORM OF MENINGITIS**

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) is advising the public to wash produce thoroughly to help prevent exposure to pesticides, bacteria, and parasites such as *angiostrongylus*, or rat lung worm. The DOH identified six probable cases of illness caused by *angiostrongylus* in 2008. All individuals were residents of the island of Hawai'i and regularly ate fresh raw vegetables from backyard gardens.

The parasite *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* causes a rare form of meningitis called eosinophilic meningitis or angiostrongyliasis. The condition is also referred to as "rat lung worm" because rats are part of the life cycle of the parasite. The parasite is found in snails, slugs, and freshwater prawns, crabs fish, and possibly the flatworm in Hawai'i. Eating uncooked snails, slugs, freshwater prawns and fish can cause the rare infection, which can lead to serious illness.

"It's important to always wash raw vegetables and fruits thoroughly before eating them to remove insects, parasites, bacteria and other possibly harmful contaminants," said Dr. Sarah Park, DOH State Epidemiologist and Chief of the Disease Outbreak Control Division. Keeping home gardens free of rodents, snails and slugs can also reduce the risk of rat lung worm disease.

Signs of rat lung worm disease can include severe headaches, nausea, vomiting, neck stiffness, and other problems related to the brain and spinal cord. Most patients recover from the infection without treatment. If you think you may have angiostrongyliasis, see your health care provider and let him/her know of your exposures.

The DOH warns that freshwater prawns, crabs or fish and mollusks such as snails should be cooked thoroughly before eating. Sufficient heat (boiling 3-5 minutes) kills the parasites.

Thoroughly wash fresh vegetables and fruit before consuming and visually inspect to be sure they are free of slugs or snails. Controlling rodents, snails and slugs around your home will also decrease the risk of exposure.

For more information call the DOH East Hawai'i District Health Office at (808) 933-0912 or the West Hawaii District Health Office at (808) 322-4877. Additional information is also available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention webpage at:  
<http://www.dpd.cdc.gov/DPDx/HTML/Angiostrongyliasis.htm>

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