



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

CHIYOME LEINAALA FUKINO M.D., DIRECTOR
Phone: (808) 586-4410
Fax: (808) 586-4444

For Immediate Release: February 2, 2005

05-10

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ADVISES PUBLIC TO WASH PRODUCE THOROUGHLY

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health is investigating a few recent cases of a rare form of meningitis caused by a parasite found in snails and slugs in Hawaii. Eating uncooked garden-variety snails and slugs can cause a rare infection, which can lead to serious illness.

The Department of Health is warning the public to thoroughly wash produce before consumption. Among the many health dangers associated with eating unwashed vegetables are exposure to chemicals from pesticides, bacteria from farm animals and implements or parasites such as angiostrongylus from slugs and snails.

“Angiostrongylus is a parasite - seen in local slugs and snails for decades - that can cause serious illness if ingested,” said Health Director Chiyome Fukino, M.D. “By washing vegetables thoroughly you can prevent potential unwanted pests in your salad and protect your family.”

Health officials also warn that any recipe calling for mollusks such as snails or slugs should be cooked thoroughly. Sufficient heat will kill the parasites. Consumption of raw mollusks (snails or slugs) should be avoided.

###

For More Information Contact:
Darcie A. Yukimura
Department of Health
Phone: (808) 586-4402
Email: dayukimura@mail.health.state.hi.us



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Angiostrongyliasis

What is angiostrongyliasis?

Angiostrongyliasis is a disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. The disease is caused by a parasitic worm called *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* found throughout Asia and the South Pacific.

How do you get it?

You can get angiostrongyliasis by eating food contaminated by the larval stage of *A. cantonensis* worms. These worms can be found in raw or under cooked snails, slugs, prawns, and land crabs. People can also get infected by accident, by eating raw produce that contains a small snail or slug or part of one. It is not known whether the slime left by infected snails and slugs can cause infection. Angiostrongyliasis is not spread person-to-person.

What are the symptoms?

Some people do not have any symptoms, or have mild symptoms for a short time. The rare, but serious form of the infection is a type of meningitis. The symptoms of angiostrongyliasis usually include severe headache and stiffness of the neck and back, tingling or painful feelings in the skin, nausea and vomiting. Low-grade fever and a temporary paralysis of the face may also be present. Light sensitivity may also occur. The symptoms can last from a few days to several months.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start 1 to 3 weeks after exposure to the parasite.

What is the treatment for angiostrongyliasis?

There is no specific treatment for this disease. The parasite dies over time, so the infection is self-limiting. Supportive treatment and pain medications can be given to relieve symptoms. Patients are sometimes treated with steroids.

If you get it once, can you get it again?

Probably so. There is no evidence that a person develops immunity to a repeated infection with this parasitic worm.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

No. Angiostrongyliasis is not spread person-to-person.

How do you keep from getting it?

Do not eat raw foods contaminated with snails or slugs. If you must handle these mollusks, wear gloves and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. Washing produce may not remove all infectious larvae, so avoid eating anything that you know has been contaminated by snails or slugs.

Boil suspect snails, prawns, fishes, and crabs for at least 3 to 5 minutes, or freeze at 5°F (15°C) for at least 24 hours; this will kill the larval stage of the worm.

For more information, see the CDC's website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/angiostrongylus/factsht_angiostrongylus.htm