

13 May 2010

Warning on eating raw slugs

NSW Health is warning people of the dangers of eating raw slugs, which although extremely rare, can cause meningitis.

Animals, including slugs and snails, can carry a range of infections, including bacteria, virus and parasites that may infect people. One parasite (or worm) carried by slugs and snails is *Angiostrongylus* (also called rat lung worm). The adult form of the worm is found only in rodents, and infected rodents pass larvae in their faeces which snails and slugs can eat, getting infected.

NSW Health understands that there may be a suspected case in NSW of rat lung worm, however as this is not a notifiable disease and for privacy reasons is unable to provide further details.

Dr Jeremy McAnulty, NSW Health Director of Communicable Diseases, said you should not eat raw slugs or snails and other animals, and ensure that you wash your hands after touching them.

"It is also important to thoroughly wash and cook any produce that could be contaminated by animals," he said.

The parasite is mainly found in Asia and Pacific Islands, and occasionally elsewhere. It is rare for people to get infected in Australia, however, this occasionally occurs if a person eats an uncooked infected slug or snail.

"In the past, this sometimes has happened after a person has been dared to eat a slug or snail.

"If infected, people may have no symptoms or only mild short lived symptoms. Sometimes the infection causes meningitis with headache, stiff neck, tingling or pain in the skin, fever, nausea, and vomiting. People who develop these symptoms should see their doctor.

"Even if infected, most people recover fully without treatment. However, it can sometimes cause severe meningitis. Because humans are not the natural host of the parasite, the parasite eventually dies without treatment," added Dr McAnulty.

Rat lung worm infection cannot be passed on to other people.