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## **Statement by George D. Szigeti, President and CEO, Hawai'i Tourism Authority**

### **RE: Rat Lungworm Disease is Very Rare and Easily Preventable in Hawai'i**

**HONOLULU** – George D. Szigeti, president and CEO of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA), issued the following statement to reassure Hawai'i's tourism industry and visitors planning trips to the Hawaiian Islands that rat lungworm disease is very rare and easily preventable.

"Some national media attention has been devoted recently to rat lungworm disease in Hawai'i, raising concerns among visitors and groups planning trips to the Hawaiian Islands. It is important that people not overreact and gather reliable information before making any assumptions.

"On the recommendation of the Hawai'i State Department of Health, residents and visitors of Hawai'i can be assured there is nothing to fear about getting infected as long as they use smart common sense when washing, preparing and storing food.

"The key facts that everyone needs to remember about rat lungworm disease is that it is very rare, it is very uncommon for people to get infected, and the disease is easily preventable by properly washing and storing all food, especially produce, before eating.

"To the visitors already in the Hawaiian Islands or planning a trip here in the coming months, there is no need to be overly concerned. Please patronize our restaurants and enjoy the delicious island cuisine and fresh produce that helps to make Hawai'i such a beloved travel experience.

"I would strongly recommend anyone wanting trusted information about rat lungworm disease to visit the Department of Health website ([health.hawaii.gov](http://health.hawaii.gov)) and learn the facts.

"Hawai'i, which has 1.4 million residents and welcomed more than 8.9 million visitors in 2016, typically has between one to 11 cases of rat lungworm disease reported annually, according to the Department of Health.

"Thus far in 2017, 11 people have been infected with the disease, nine residents and two visitors. While the cause of two cases is still being investigated, the Department of Health reports that the remaining nine cases could have been prevented with better hygiene and by properly washing, preparing and storing food.

"We hope knowing this information helps allay concerns about travel to the Hawaiian Islands, which continues to be the cleanest, healthiest, safest and most welcoming destination in the world."

#### **About the Hawai'i Tourism Authority**

The [Hawai'i Tourism Authority](http://hawaii tourism authority.org) is responsible for strategically managing the State of Hawai'i's marketing initiatives to support tourism. HTA's goal is to optimize tourism's benefits for Hawai'i, while being attentive to the interests of travelers, the community and visitor industry. Established in 1998 to support Hawai'i's leading industry and largest employer, HTA continually strives to help ensure the sustainability of tourism's success.

For more information about HTA, please visit [www.hawaii tourism authority.org](http://www.hawaii tourism authority.org). Follow updates about HTA on Facebook, Twitter (@HawaiiHTA) and its YouTube Channel.

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