

Snails, slugs, and human health: What Inspectors and Field employees should know.



Giant African snail



Semi slug



Wear Gloves



Wash hands

Agricultural inspectors in the Plant Inspection Stations (PIS), cargo, and Smuggling Interdiction Trade Compliance should be aware of potential exposure to the rat lungworm disease. Snails and slugs (mollusks) are intermediate hosts.

Can people get infected with this parasite?

Yes. People can get infected, under unusual circumstances. Depending on the degree of infection, people may have milder symptoms, including headaches and sensitivity of light and/or physical contact, but others may have much more serious symptoms including coma, permanent brain damage, or rarely, even death. When people accidentally become infected, the disease is called Rat lungworm disease or cerebral Angiostrongyliasis. Diagnosing the infection can be difficult, as there are no readily available blood tests. There is no specific treatment for the disease, so prevention is of paramount importance.

How can people get infected?

Inspectors handling infected snails or slugs without gloves. Fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers from tropical and subtropical countries are potentially dangerous, as well as PPQ inspectors handling plants at the PIS's. People can also become infected by ingesting a raw or undercooked snails, or part of one, infected with the parasite. Raw produce that contains small snails or slugs and slug slime can also be a means of infection. It is also suggested that the rat lungworm larvae can exit the mollusk host through the slime.

CDC reports that this disease has been found in Asia, Pacific Islands, Caribbean, and Africa. In the U.S., Hawaii has reported cases.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements for handling snails or slugs are:

➤ **ALWAYS WEAR GLOVES.**

Do not handle snails or slugs with your bare hands. Even when wearing gloves, inspectors should make every effort not to touch mucus membranes, such as eyes, nose, or mouth. Be especially cautious when inspecting aquatic plants. If the snails are in water, do not come in contact with the water.

➤ **Wash hands after handling (even after wearing gloves)**

➤ **Treat the means of conveyance with the same caution.** Boxes, bags or any other containers may be contaminated. Treat these surfaces with the same caution as handling the snails and slugs.

[For more information go to www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)