

HALTON REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
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TO: Halton Physicians

Medical Chiefs of Staff: Joseph Brant Hospital, Halton Healthcare (Oakville, Milton and Georgetown Hospitals)
Chairs of: Family Practice, Paediatrics, Internal Medicine, Emergency, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Surgery
Chief of Laboratory Services and Infection Control Practitioners

POST IN: Emergency Department and Physicians Lounge

FROM: Dr. Julie Emili, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: January 18, 2019

RE: Advisory to Healthcare Providers re: Baylisascaris

The Halton Region Health Department has been advised that on December 21 a group of rabbits at the Tim Hortons Onondaga Farms Camp in St. George, ON, was found to be infected by *Baylisascaris procyonis* (B. procyonis) parasite.

- The rabbits at the camp were likely infected as a result of fecal contamination of corn fed to the rabbits from October 1 to December 7, 2018. Rabbits feeding on contaminated corn would also have microscopic parasite eggs adhered to the fur of their faces.
- School groups of children between the ages of 9 and 14 visited the camp between October 1 and December 7 and handled the rabbits. Parents were advised of the exposure and to contact their health provider should their child become ill.
- The last group of campers visited on December 7, 2018. Since then, the camp has removed the suspected source of contamination and is working to complete disinfection of the rabbit enclosure.
- The risk to campers is believed to be **very low**.

What you need to know:

- B. procyonis is transmitted by the ingestion of infectious parasite eggs.
- B. procyonis cannot complete its lifecycle in the human gastrointestinal tract, and once infective eggs hatch in the intestine, the larvae migrate out into tissues through the bloodstream, causing damage to tissues and organs (larval migrans).
- Human cases of B procyonis infection are uncommon, but can be serious, due to larva migrans. Depending on where the larvae migrate, Baylisascaris infection can affect the brain and spinal cord (neural larva migrans), the eye (ocular larva migrans), and/or other organs (visceral larva migrans).

Signs and symptoms:

- Non-specific signs and symptoms may appear as soon as one week post-infection and include but are not limited to nausea, fever, and lethargy. Specific clinical presentations vary depending on the dose and location of migrating larvae in the body.
 - Neural larva migrans often presents as acute eosinophilic meningoencephalitis. Signs and symptoms may develop within 2 to 4 weeks after ingestion of large numbers of infective eggs and include weakness, incoordination, ataxia, irritability, weakness, seizures, altered mental status, stupor, and/or coma. Once symptoms and signs of neurologic disease are detected, significant pathology generally is already present
 - Ocular larva migrans may present as diffuse unilateral subacute neuroretinitis, photophobia, retinitis, and/or blindness (typically unilateral). This manifestation can occur with neural larva migrans or alone
 - Visceral larva migrans may be associated with macular rash, abdominal pain, hepatomegaly, and pneumonitis. Larvae can cause inflammatory reactions in organs and tissue damage.
- Symptoms can appear as soon as 1-4 weeks after ingesting eggs. However, cases where Infection is due to the ingestion of lower numbers of parasite eggs can have longer incubation periods.
- In cases where children present with symptoms consistent with neural, ocular or visceral migrans and a history of attending the Tim Hortons Onondaga Farms Camp in St. George, Ontario between October 1 and December 7, 2018, please consider B. procyonis as a possible cause.
- If B. procyonis infection is suspected, immediately refer the patient to an Infectious Disease Specialist for further assessment.

Please report all suspected or confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) (formerly Reportable Diseases) to the Halton Region Health Department as soon as possible. Diseases marked * should be reported immediately by telephone (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or fax (Mon-Fri, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm only). Other diseases can be reported the next working day. Call 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866. For general information, please visit halton.ca.

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