

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 29

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Testimony of Senator Anne Carney introducing
LD 1220, An Act to Require Lyme Disease Vaccine Coverage for
State-regulated Health Plans
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance
and Financial Services
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Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, my name is Senator Anne Carney, and I proudly represent Senate District 29, which includes South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, and part of Scarborough. Today, I am pleased to introduce LD 1220, “An Act to Require Lyme Disease Vaccine Coverage for State-regulated Health Plans.”

In the 2022 Lyme and Other Tickborne Illness Annual Report, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention shared data showing that Lyme disease cases increased from 1,118 in 2020 to 1,508 in 2021 (p. 15). In Cumberland County, the cases increased from 178 to 225, which is an increase of over 125% in just one year. Compared to the entire United States and our New England neighbors, Maine has the highest incidence of Lyme disease (p. 16), affecting Mainers of all ages. There are a number of reasons why Lyme disease cases are increasing, such as the fact that climate change and deforestation are increasing the range of the ticks that transmit the bacteria that causes Lyme disease. We’ve also removed the natural predators that used to control populations of deer and mice, which are two species that carry Lyme disease and spread it to humans.

Lyme disease is medical condition that people get from the *Borrelia* bacteria. Its symptoms include fever, headache, joint and muscle pains, fatigue, arthritis, facial palsy, meningitis, and carditis. Once diagnosed, the patient can take oral antibiotics for ten days to a few weeks. For more serious cases, in which the nervous system, joints, or heart are affected, the patient may need intravenous antibiotics for up to 28 days. Not all cases can be cured. According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control, “The state of the science relating to persistent symptoms associated with Lyme disease is *limited, emerging, and unsettled*.” [Italics added for emphasis.] For these patients, a Lyme disease vaccine could have prevented them from suffering from incurable late Lyme disease. It reminds me of the long COVID patients who still experience little-understood symptoms that significantly impact their daily lives.

Aside from the medicine, public health officials recommend that people take precautions to avoid tick bites:

- Wear light-colored, long-sleeved clothing and pants.
- Tuck your pants into your socks.
- Use an EPA-approved bug spray.
- Stay in the middle of trails.
- Do daily tick checks.

In addition to these actions, Pfizer and Valneva are developing a Lyme disease vaccine – VLA15 – which is in the third phase of a clinical study in humans. According to Pfizer and Valneva, if the study is successful, then the two companies would seek official authorization in 2025, which is just a year and half away. Some of you may recall the last Lyme disease vaccine, LYMERix, which was withdrawn two decades ago. Since then, pharmaceutical companies have not developed a new Lyme disease vaccine and brought it to the market.

LD 1220 would require state-regulated health insurance plans to cover Lyme disease vaccines, starting on or after January 1, 2024. Although there will be more tests and trials, I hope that we can prepare for the vaccine to return to the market. I urge the Committee to support this proactive bill that would help prevent Mainers from contracting Lyme disease.

I thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.



Anne Carney

State Senator, Senate District 29

South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, and part of Scarborough