

# Sen. Cowles: It's time to bite back against lyme disease

Posted on Thursday, May 23, 2019

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay), Senator Mark Miller (D-Monona), Representative Jeff Mursau (R-Crivitz), and Representative Nick Milroy (D-South Range) issued the following statement after releasing a package of five bills this morning to improve Wisconsin's approach to the growing problem of Lyme Disease and to foster continued discussions to bite back against this disease:

As Memorial Day approaches and the start of summer is on the horizon, residents and visitors to our state will be spending a lot of time in Wisconsin's great outdoors. While no one should ever be deterred from enjoying a beautiful Wisconsin summer outside, we need to help raise the awareness of the dangers that ticks can pose to our long-term well-being.

Lyme Disease is the highest reported tick-borne disease in Wisconsin with a total of 38,394 cases reported between 1990 and 2015. In 2017, Wisconsin was the 4th-worst state in the nation for incidence of Lyme Disease with an average annual incidence of 74.5 per 100,000 resulting in over 4,000 cases estimated by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). While about a dozen other states have taken actions to address the disease in recent sessions, Wisconsin has fallen behind as rates of Lyme Disease have doubled in the last decade and experts believe the number of cases may be much higher.

The problem of Lyme Disease is growing and shows no signs of slowing. While this package is not a comprehensive, cure-all solution, we have the potential to take a large bite out of the issue of Lyme Disease by raising awareness and prevention among Wisconsinites. These bills would help to educate people on how to prevent tick bites and to remind people to search the body for ticks after time outside. Further, these bills would help to raise awareness of the warning signs of Lyme Disease to catch more cases early and allow for the better management and treatment of the disease. By approaching the awareness and prevention of Lyme Disease through this package, we can ensure that the Legislature has made a bold first step and has fostered continuing discussions to combat Lyme Disease and other vector-borne illnesses in our state.

Bill draft numbers and an overview of the five bills is listed below. All five bills were circulated for co-sponsorship in the Legislature today, and are circulating until Tuesday, June 4th.

LRBs 1758 and 3360 – Requires the DNR to post signs to raise awareness of Lyme Disease, inform on how to prevent tick bites, and encourage visitors to check for ticks after visits to be posted in a common area, such as the park entrance, a trailhead or in a campground, in all State Parks, Forests, Recreational Areas, and Trails

LRBs 1759 and 3359 – Requires the DNR to sell bug spray with DEET, which can help to repel ticks, in all State Parks and Forests when their Park or Forest Office or other location in the Park or Forest, such as a concession stand, is open

LRBs 2738 and 3358 – Requires the DNR to post information in certain Parks brochures to raise awareness of Lyme Disease, inform on how to prevent tick bites, and encourage visitors to check for ticks after visiting a State Park, and requires the DNR to complete an annual awareness campaign in May of each year, which is Lyme Disease Awareness Month, on digital and print platforms to raise awareness of Lyme Disease, inform on how to prevent tick bites, and encourage visitors to check for ticks after spending time outdoors

LRBs 1658 and 3355 – Provides an Epidemiologist Advanced position at DHS's Division of Communicable Disease with the position dedicated to vector-borne diseases spread by mosquitoes, ticks, and other insects with a specific focus on Lyme Disease, including raising awareness about and creating informational materials about Lyme Disease and other vector borne diseases

LRBs 1652 and 3362 – Establishes a sixteen-member Tick-Borne Disease Study Committee to create a report for the legislature on consensus-based

recommendations for policy changes on awareness, prevention, surveillance, diagnosis, reporting, and treatment of Lyme Disease