



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH

Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
Hearing on Lyme Disease

Testimony of  
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Good morning, Chairwoman Brooks and Chairman Haywood and members of the committee. Thank you for extending the invitation to speak about the state of Lyme and other tickborne diseases (TBD) in Pennsylvania.

The Department's mission is to promote healthy behaviors, prevent injury and disease, and to assure the safe delivery of quality health care for all people in Pennsylvania. The Department regards its critical role in the response to TBDs as promoting prevention methods, educating the public on Lyme and TBDs, conducting surveillance of Lyme and TBDs, and ensuring providers receive timely and accurate information on testing and treatment of Lyme and TBDs.

Many other agencies within the Commonwealth, including the Departments of Environmental Protection, Education, Conservation and Natural Resources, Agriculture, Transportation, as well as the Fish and Boat and Game Commission, play a role in our effort to combat Lyme and other TBDs. I have enjoyed collaborating with these agencies through the Lyme and Other Tick-borne Diseases Interagency Workgroup, which I launched in September 2021 to ensure the recommendations published in 2015 by the Lyme and Related Tick-Borne Diseases Taskforce were responded to and implemented. The purpose of the workgroup is to develop and implement a state-wide comprehensive approach to Lyme and other TBDs, including surveillance, prevention, education, identification, and treatment. For a more comprehensive look at the workgroup's efforts, please read [\*The Commonwealth's Response to Lyme and Other Tickborne Diseases\*](#), published in June 2022.

To reduce Lyme and other TBDs in the Commonwealth, the Department conducts several preventative and educational activities. With the understanding that elementary aged children are one of the highest risk groups for Lyme and other TBDs, the Department has, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), developed a toolkit for elementary school instructors that was first distributed during the 2019-2020 school year and was updated in January 2022. Additionally, school nurses are required to provide information on tick awareness to students and parents to prevent avoidable tick bites. Annually PDE and DOH host the Lyme Disease Art Contest, which invites elementary school children to submit Lyme and tick-related artwork. Our hope is that not only do we educate Pennsylvania's students, but that we also empower them to be our valued partners in Lyme and tickborne disease prevention. The DOH's Bureau of Epidemiology created *Bite Labs*, an interactive educational experience consisting of tri-fold boards with 25 interchangeable posters tailored for the viewing audience. Pennsylvanian's who interact with *Bite Labs* can access hands on items to learn what ticks look



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like, educational handouts, and giveaways such as bookmarks, tick remover tools, and tick ID cards. First piloted in 2021, the Bite Labs have since been distributed to DOH's district offices to assist with vector awareness and education. Bite Labs can be found at schools, summer camps, and other community events.

Other educational materials are readily available on the Department's website, including toolkits, posters, and brochures. These are updated when appropriate, with an eye towards scientific accuracy and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The DOH conducts public awareness initiatives annually to educate the public on Lyme and other TBDs and is actively in the process of hiring another public health educator to assist in these efforts. The Department oversees several ongoing social media campaigns, which alert the public about tick safety and Lyme disease when the Department observes increases in seasonal tick related emergency department visits and throughout the summer. Videos on tick safety and signs and symptoms of LD are in development by the DOH and Commonwealth Media Services with an expected completion date of Spring 2023. These will be shared with the public once complete.

We have long history of surveillance of Lyme and other tickborne diseases which goes back decades. In 2013, the Department expanded its surveillance capabilities by utilizing a responsive emergency system which could identify an increase in tick related complaints. Since having this data, the Department has been able to identify the beginning of tick season and any unusual upswells in the tick population. Perhaps most importantly, this expansion also allowed us to identify possible Lyme disease cases more quickly than traditional case reporting. When the Department identifies an increase in ticks and possible Lyme disease, an advisory is sent to all our registered Health Alert Network (HAN) providers. This advisory includes links to resources managed by the CDC as well as services provided by the Department of Health. A press release is also issued to notify the public. The most recent tick-related advisory notice was issued on [August 26, 2022](#). The Department remains committed to keeping the Commonwealth safe through its surveillance activities and prevention and education efforts. For further information regarding tick surveillance activity, please see our last surveillance report which was published in October 2021. An updated surveillance report will be published in Fall 2022. Contained within that report are the methodologies used to conduct these surveillance efforts as well as data and visualization on the prevalence of Lyme and other tickborne illnesses in Pennsylvania. Funding is also provided to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to conduct active tick surveillance, which provides a representative sample of ticks that can be extrapolated to a larger area. The results of their most recent tick surveillance can be found on DEP's [Tick Surveillance and Testing webpage](#).

In recognition that surveillance practices are everchanging and critical to disease prevention, the Department has convened a Community of Practice (CoP) for tick researchers in the Commonwealth. The CoP brings together all tick surveillance entities in the state to streamline processes, collaborate and share best practices. Members of the CoP include the DOH, DEP, PDA, East Stroudsburg University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Grove City College,



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Muhlenberg College, Penn State, Shippensburg University, University of Pittsburgh, and Westminster College. We are honored to have East Stroudsburg on the panel with us today and appreciate their efforts to reduce Lyme disease in the Commonwealth.

In March 2022, within my purview as Physician General, I sent a letter to healthcare provider associations, health systems, county and municipal health departments, and school nurses encouraging participation in Lyme and TBD web-based training offered by the DOH. Our most recent brochure was also shared with these recipients, which covers signs and symptoms, testing, diagnosis, and treatment for LD as well as other TBD, in preparation for peak tick bite season in Pennsylvania. The DOH supports the Infectious Disease Society of America's [\*Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Lyme Disease\*](#), which are presented in our publicized webinar. The DOH is also currently partnering with the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association to create a web-based training for veterinarians. This training will provide information and instruction on diagnosis, treatment and prevention for Lyme and other TBDs of concern to pets and other animals. Once this training has been fully designed, we will share it with the broader community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be with you today to discuss this issue. I am happy to take any questions you may have at this time.