Before the night she suffered a severe allergic reaction that took her life nine days later, 13-year-old Annie LeGere had grown up with only minor allergy symptoms. There was no reason for her, her family or her health providers to believe she should have a prescription to an epinephrine autoinjector, the emergency treatment that can save lives in cases of anaphylaxis (a serious allergic reaction, most commonly to food).

But what if the first people often to respond to a medical emergency (including in Annie’s case) — local police officers — could carry these autoinjectors and be trained on how to administer them? The minutes saved by administering the drug on-site rather than in an emergency room could be the difference between life and death.

In Illinois, these officers now will have the opportunity, thanks to a bill passed this year (HB 4462) known as Annie’s Law. One of the leading proponents of HB 4462, Illinois Sen. Chris Nybo, worked closely on the measure with Annie’s family, which has created a foundation in her name with the goal of preventing future tragedies.

The story hit particularly close to home for Nybo. His own child has a tree nut allergy, and he lives in the same Chicago suburb as the LeGere family. Nybo, too, has been teaming up with a legislative colleague (Rep. Michelle Mussman) on bipartisan bills to improve access to autoinjectors ever since the two of them entered the legislature together in 2011.

The new law does not mandate Illinois State Police or local law enforcement to carry the autoinjectors or receive the necessary training. However, HB 4662 provides the statutory authority that police needed to get the prescription.

Similarly, a 2011 bill (HB 3294) set no mandates on local schools to stock the autoinjectors, but Nybo says the reaction across the state has been “wonderful,” with thousands of schools deciding to carry the medicine after they got the authority to do so.

Nybo, Mussman, Annie LeGere’s family and friends, and others joined together in late August at a ceremony that honored Annie and celebrated passage of the law allowing law enforcement to carry the autoinjectors. Around the same time, a huge spike in the cost of EpiPens — which dominate the market for epinephrine autoinjectors — made headlines across the country.

“That pricing increase is certainly working against what we’ve been trying to do in Springfield, which is improve access,” Nybo says. Higher costs could mean that fewer police departments and schools in Illinois choose to stock the lifesaving product, and Nybo says their decisions are critical because potentially deadly allergic reactions can hit people who have had no or only mild allergy symptoms in the past. As a result, these people don’t have prescriptions for an epinephrine autoinjector.

Nybo worries, too, that the big change in pricing could keep individuals from refilling their prescriptions in a timely manner.

“Then it may not work sufficiently to save someone’s life,” he adds.

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