



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Q4 2024 Communique

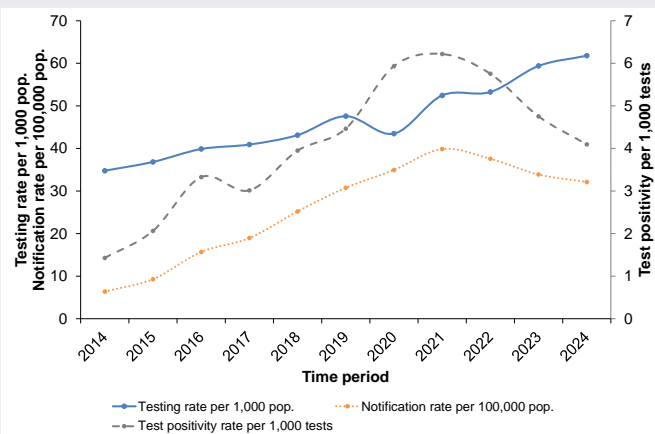
(Data for the current 12-month period from January 2024 to December 2024)

## Background



- The syphilis outbreak was first identified in the Kimberley region mid-2014 and was subsequently identified in the Pilbara, Goldfields, Midwest, metropolitan Perth and South West regions.
- The Chief Health Officer authorised a statewide public health response to infectious syphilis in 2020.
- The Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) coordinates the statewide response to infectious and congenital syphilis.

## Syphilis notification rate, testing rate, and test positivity rate in WA by time period.



Comparison to peak	2021	2024	Change
Testing rate/1,000 pop.	52.5	61.8	18% ▲
Notification rate/100,000 pop.	39.9	32.1	-19% ▼
Test positivity/1,000 tests	6.2	4.1	-34% ▼

- 2014 to 2021: Notification rate ▲ due to ▲ disease transmission and to a lesser extent ▲ testing.
- 2021 to 2024: After peaking in 2021, notification rate ▼ due to ▼ disease transmission, despite ▲ testing.

In the period from 2021 to 2024::



- Decrease in notifications occurred across Aboriginality, sex, age groups and exposure categories.



- Increase in overall testing rate. Also increase in number of syphilis PoCTs and proportion of antenatal females who had a total of three syphilis tests during pregnancy.



- Notable increase in syphilis notifications in the Midwest region due to increased disease transmission.



- There were no congenital syphilis notifications in WA in 2024. The last case reported in October 2023.



## WA SORG Priority Areas

(Data for the current 12-month period from January 2024 to December 2024)

### Priority Area 1: Community engagement, education, and prevention





HealthySexual campaign is being developed, with a focus on syphilis and gonorrhoea education which is scheduled to go live in May 2025.

### Priority Area 2: Workforce development

Regional Sexual Health Teams Workshop Training occurred on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025

WACHS 'Hackathon' workshop on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025 for syphilis leads to reflect on and discuss the regional syphilis response.

### Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing

Indicator	Trend by quarter (target in red)	2023	2024	% Change	Target
Number of syphilis PoC tests		2264	2153	-5% ▼	-
% of symptomatic infectious syphilis cases who were treated on the first presentation to a health service		43%	62%	44% ▲	80%
% of infectious syphilis cases treated within one week of diagnosis		30%	24%	-20% ▼	80%
% of named contacts of syphilis cases who are treated for syphilis on the first presentation to a health service as part of comprehensive syphilis case management		50%	52%	4% ■	80%


Standard Administrative Procedures currently being developed for public health units to upload syphilis diagnosis and treatment history to My Health Record.

### Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting

Progressing towards streamlined statewide reporting targets and data

WebPAS alerts for hard-to-locate patients with untreated syphilis are ready to be rolled out in regional WA

### Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care

Indicator	Trend by quarter (target in red)	2023	2024	% Change	Target
% of women of childbearing age (15-44 years of age) whose pregnancy status is identified within 2 days of their syphilis result being known to be positive		28%	21%	-25% ▼	100%

One congenital syphilis case notified in March 2025, and one near-miss case notified in February 2025.



## WA SORG Communique Definitions

Childbearing age	Aged between 15 and 44 years.
Notification data	Extracted from the Western Australian Notifiable Infectious Diseases Database (WANIDD).
Notification rate	Crude rate calculated by dividing the number of notifications by the population. Not adjusted for age or other factors. Expressed per 100,000 population.
Pathology testing data	Between 2014 and 2023, data on the number of tests undertaken for syphilis in WA was provided by five pathology laboratories. During this period, 77% of syphilis notifications in WA were from these five laboratories. One laboratory that does not contribute testing data is a significant service provider in the metropolitan and South West regions, therefore resulting in an underestimation of the number of tests and testing rates in WA. There are insufficient data to quantify the magnitude of this underestimation; however, absence of these data is unlikely to affect the trends in test numbers and testing rates over time.
PoC tests	Point of care test(s). The DoH syphilis PoCT program has been active since mid-2020.
Priority areas	Data sourced from the quarterly WA SORG meetings and the WA SORG Quarterly Report Dashboard.
Test positivity rate	Number of positive test results (i.e. statutory notifications) from laboratories providing testing data divided by the number of tests conducted by these laboratories. Expressed per 1,000 tests.
Testing data	Provided by Australian Clinical Labs, PathWest and Western Diagnostics Pathology.
Testing rate	Crude rate calculated by dividing the number of tests by the population. Not adjusted for age or other factors. Expressed per 1,000 population.