



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – December 2020

<b>Security</b>	For the Working Group – In confidence
<b>Target audience</b>	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
<b>Communique no.</b>	7
<b>Reporting Data</b>	As of 30 September 2020 (current status)

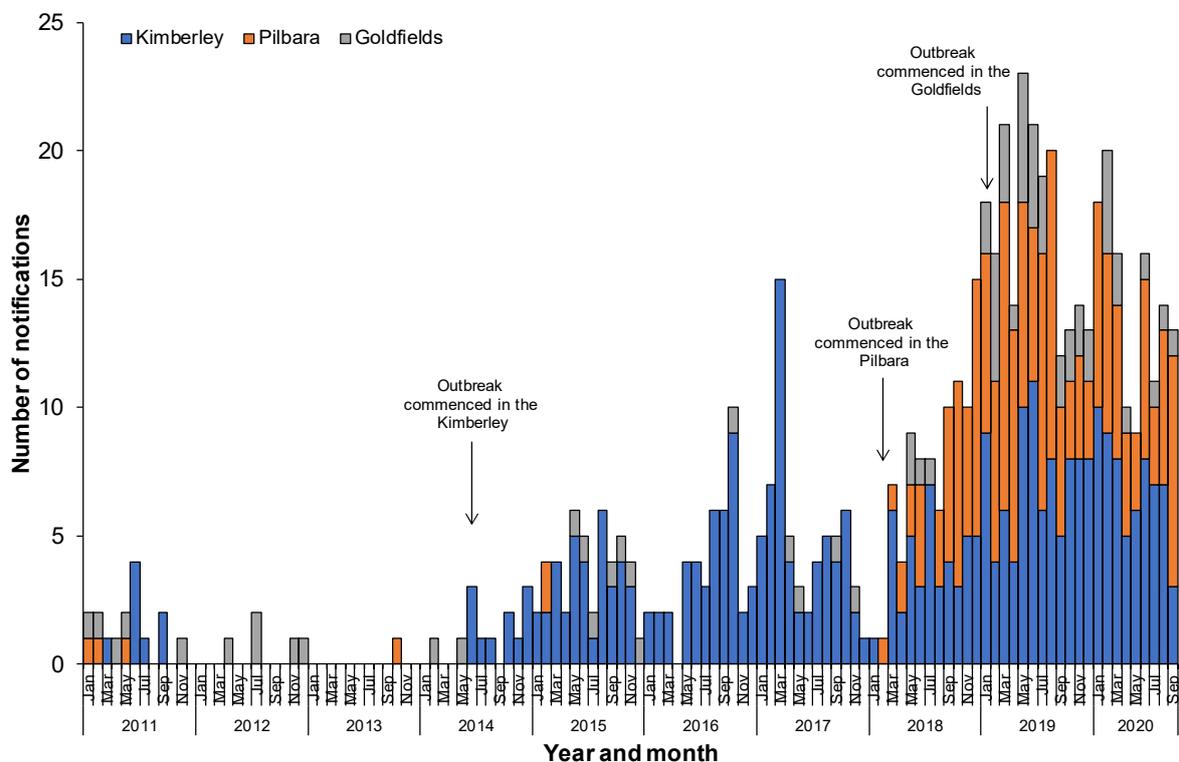
## The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG)

The WA SORG is responsible for coordinating a statewide response to the increasing notifications of infectious syphilis that are being experienced in WA. The WA SORG reports to the WA Chief Health Officer, with regular briefings provided to the national Multijurisdictional Syphilis Outbreak Working Group, and the national Enhanced Response Addressing Sexually Transmissible Infections (and Blood Borne Viruses) in Indigenous Populations Governance Group (the Governance Group). The WA SORG encompasses the Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields, South West and Perth Metropolitan regions.

This communique provides a quarterly update of the WA syphilis outbreak response; the previous Communique (no. 6) was made available in August 2020.

## Current status

The outbreak data for affected regions in WA to 30 September 2020 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.



**Figure 1.** Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people in affected regions in WA (Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields), from 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2020.

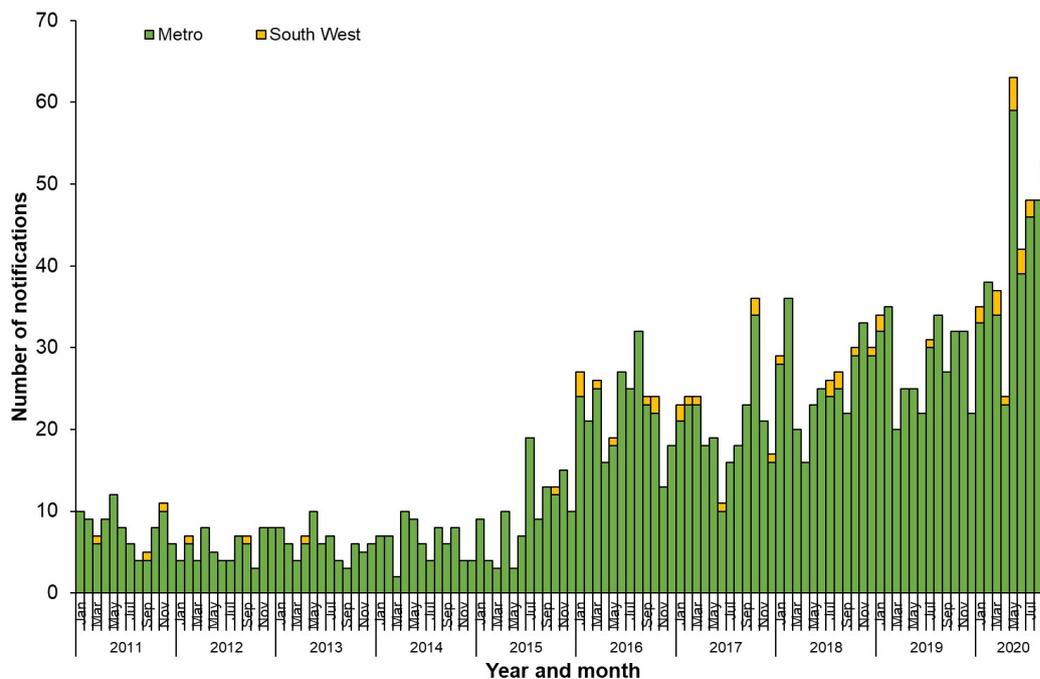


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**Table 1.** Characteristics of outbreak cases of infectious syphilis notified in regions of Western Australia, from 1 June 2014 to 30 September 2020<sup>1</sup>.

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields	Total
<b>Characteristics</b>				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases <sup>2</sup> last quarter: Apr to Jun 2020	19	14	2	35
Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2020	17	18	3	38
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	341	181	42	564
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	86 (25%)	54 (30%)	5 (12%)	145 (26%)
20-24 yrs	85 (25%)	37 (20%)	6 (14%)	128 (23%)
25-29 yrs	52 (15%)	29 (16%)	12 (29%)	93 (16%)
30-34 yrs	39 (11%)	25 (14%)	6 (14%)	70 (12%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	41%	44%	40%	42%
Female	59%	56%	60%	58%
Congenital cases				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	0	0	0

\* Not all age groups included



**Figure 2.** Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Please note that all data are provisional and subject to change due to ongoing case investigation.



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**Table 2.** Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases notified in the metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 June 2014 to 30 September 2020.

	Metro	South West
<b>Characteristics</b>		
Cases <sup>2</sup> last quarter: Apr to Jun 2020	121	8
Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2020	145	4
Total number of cases (since June 2014)	1,677	44
<b>Aboriginality</b>		
Aboriginal	107 (6%)	7 (16%)
non-Aboriginal	1,570 (94%)	37 (84%)
<b>Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*</b>		
15-19 yrs	53 (3%)	7 (16%)
20-24 yrs	206 (12%)	7 (16%)
25-29 yrs	314 (19%)	5 (11%)
30-34 yrs	306 (18%)	6 (14%)
35-39 yrs	230 (14%)	5 (11%)
40-44 yrs	193 (12%)	3 (7%)
<b>% Cases reported by sex</b>		
Male	1,487 (89%)	31 (70%)
Female	178 (11%)	13 (30%)
Transgender	12 (1%)	0 (0%)
<b>Exposure category</b>		
MSM	1,147 (68%)	17 (39%)
Heterosexual	440 (26%)	24 (55%)
Unknown	78 (5%)	2 (5%)
<b>Congenital cases</b>		
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	2 (1)	0 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	1	0

## Governance Update

### WA SORG

- The WA SORG meets on a quarterly basis and the last meeting was on 23 September 2020.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* is under review and an annual report is being developed to provide an overview of the progress made by the WA SORG and future actions.
- In addition to the outbreak regions outlined in the epidemiology data, there have also been outbreaks in the Perth Metropolitan area and the South West region, though the demographics and epidemiology have been different to the outbreak in the north of WA.
- As a result, the Chief Health Officer recently endorsed amendments to the Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) Terms of Reference (TOR) to reflect a state-wide response to the number of syphilis outbreaks.
- The membership in the Terms of Reference has been reviewed and will now include representatives from all seven WA Country Health Service regions as well as the Perth metropolitan area.



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**Table 3. WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan key priority area activity updates.**

<p><b>Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flipcharts are being produced by AHCWA with funding from WACHS.</li> <li>• The Pilbara region are looking into developing talking posters to provide education and information in local language.</li> <li>• The Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program has established a small working group and is finalising the development of a Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Social Media Toolkit which will be available by the end of 2020.</li> <li>• The WA Department of Health ran a syphilis social marketing campaign from September to October 2020 which has since been evaluated.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 2: Workforce development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The annual Regional Sexual Health Teams workshop was delivered in Perth from 19-20 October. 38 people attended the workshop from 17 organisations.</li> <li>• Syphilis videoconferences continue to be coordinated by CDCD and are uploaded to WA SORG website after the session. A 'Questions from the Field' session was provided in September and an 'Interpreting Syphilis Results' session was provided in October.</li> <li>• The ASHM STI Testing in Primary Care: Western Australia Online Learning Module was launched in September 2020.</li> <li>• AHCWA delivered the Birds and the BBVs training in Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Albany.</li> <li>• Seven trainings events were delivered in the South West for 135 health professionals attended since early October.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA PoCT Program has 19 sites registered in the program and has three trainings planned for December.</li> <li>• The syphilis quick guide has been distributed to a variety of health care workers including head of emergency medicine, obstetric staff, gynaecologists and general practitioners.</li> <li>• The Kimberley has been rolling out the Test More Campaign to complement the Orientation Video.</li> <li>• AHCWA developed and disseminated a syphilis screensaver template to provide a testing reminder for GPs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The WA SORG Annual Report for 2019/20 is complete and pending final feedback from the WA SORG.</li> <li>• A syphilis management system is being created and work is under way with HSS to review the concept approval request for establishing the GO.data outbreak management system (World Health Organisation).</li> <li>• Scoping work has also commenced to develop a standardised and consistent data dictionary and questionnaire set.</li> <li>• A dashboard for the reporting of WA syphilis PoCT program is in the final stage of draft development. The dashboard will aim to compile data and offer useful data aggregated by region.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Baby Baskets Program continues to be delivered in the Pilbara region with the Goldfields looking to implement a similar initiative.</li> <li>• Two congenital syphilis investigations have occurred with relevant health agencies in the Perth metropolitan area.</li> </ul>

**Prepared by:**  
WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group  
December 2020

Further information relating to the WA SORG available on the WA SORG webpage:  
[https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U\\_Z/WA-Syphilis-outbreak-response](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/WA-Syphilis-outbreak-response)