



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – July 2021

Security	For the Working Group – In confidence
Target audience	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
Communique no.	9
Reporting Data	As of 31 March 2021 (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. 8) was made available in March 2021.

Current status

The outbreak data in people living in regions affected by the ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal communities; i.e. the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields regions to 31 March 2021 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

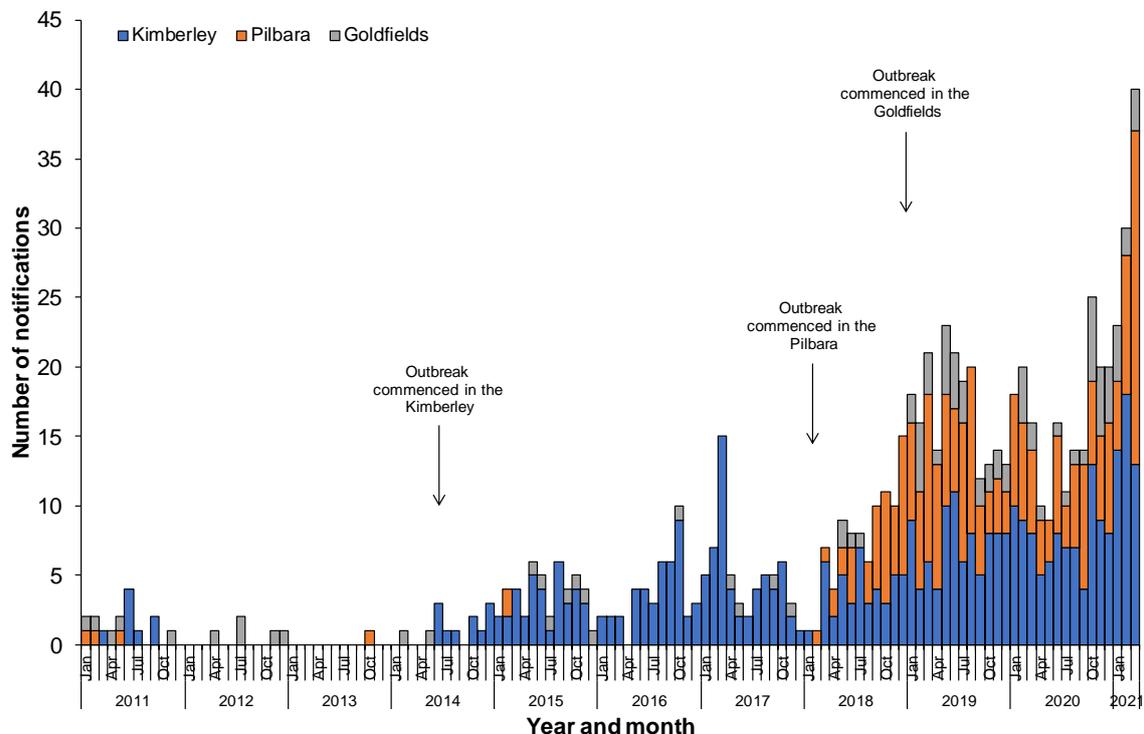


Figure 1. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people living in regions affected by the ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal communities, i.e. the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields, from 1 January 2011 to 31 March 2021.



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Table 1. Characteristics of outbreak cases of infectious syphilis notifications among people living in regions affected by an ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal people, i.e. in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields regions of WA, from 1 June 2014 to 31 March 2021¹.

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields	Total
Characteristics				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases last quarter: Oct to Dec 2020	30	20	15	65
Cases this quarter: Jan to Mar 2021	45	39	9	93
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	417	240	66	723
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	99 (24%)	65 (27%)	11 (17%)	175 (24%)
20-24 yrs	103 (25%)	55 (23%)	9 (14%)	167 (23%)
25-29 yrs	63 (15%)	37 (15%)	18 (27%)	118 (16%)
30-34 yrs	47 (11%)	34 (14%)	9 (14%)	90 (12%)
35+ yrs	94 (23%)	40 (17%)	18 (27%)	152 (21%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	177 (42%)	108 (45%)	29 (44%)	314 (43%)
Female	240 (58%)	132 (55%)	37 (56%)	409 (57%)
Congenital cases				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	1 (0)	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	0	0	0

* Not all age groups included

The Chief Health Officer authorised a state-wide public health response to infectious syphilis in identified at-risk populations after increased cases emerged in the Perth metropolitan area and South West region. The data for these two areas is shown in Figure 2 and Table 2.

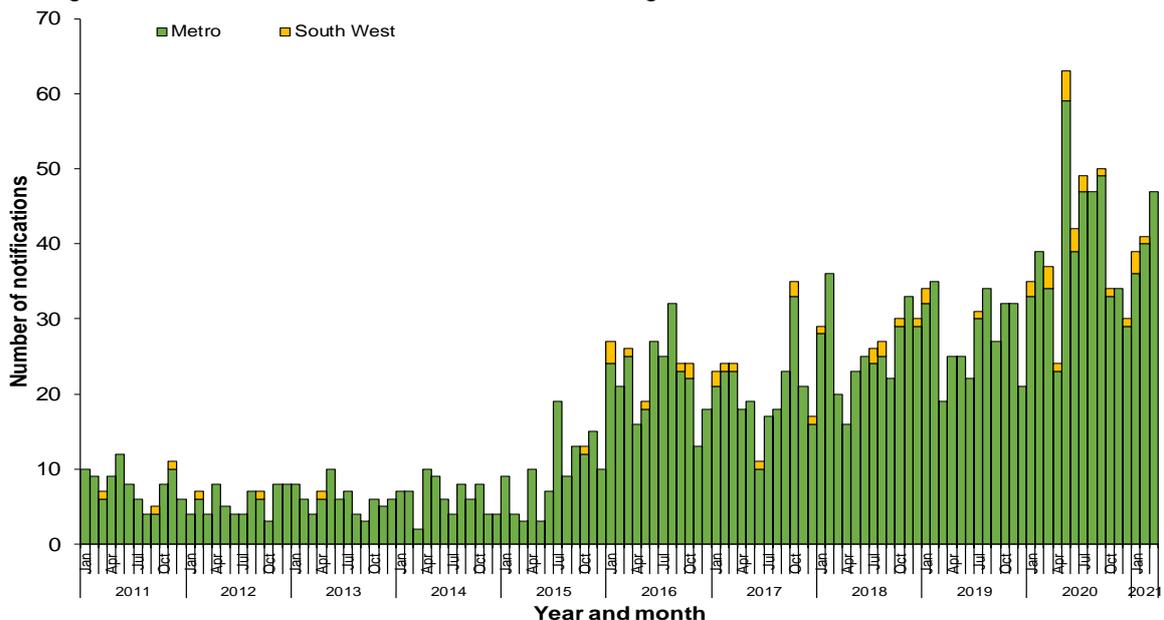


Figure 2. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Perth metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 January 2011 to 31 March 2021.

¹ 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 Perth metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 June 2014 to 31 March 2021.

	Metro	South West
Characteristics		
Cases last quarter: Oct to Dec 2020	96	2
Cases this quarter: Jan to Mar 2021	124	4
Total number of cases (since June 2014)	1,894	49
Aboriginality		
Aboriginal	144 (8%)	8 (16%)
non-Aboriginal	1,750 (92%)	41 (84%)
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*		
15-19 yrs	62 (3%)	8 (16%)
20-24 yrs	222 (12%)	8 (16%)
25-29 yrs	352 (19%)	7 (14%)
30-34 yrs	344 (18%)	6 (12%)
35-39 yrs	273 (14%)	5 (10%)
40-44 yrs	217 (11%)	3 (6%)
45+ yrs	422 (22%)	12 (24%)
% Cases reported by sex		
Male	1,639 (87%)	33 (67%)
Female	245 (13%)	16 (33%)
Transgender	10 (1%)	0 (0%)
Exposure category		
MSM	1,251 (66%)	17 (35%)
Heterosexual	545 (29%)	30 (61%)
Unknown	88 (5%)	2 (4%)
Congenital cases		
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)~	3 (1)	0 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	1	0

* Not all age groups included

~ Congenital cases in the Metropolitan region: confirmed (one in a non-Aboriginal person in 2018; two among non-Aboriginal people in 2020); probable (one in an Aboriginal person in 2020); deaths in congenital cases (one in an Aboriginal person in 2020).

Governance Update

WA SORG

- The WA SORG meets on a quarterly basis and the last meeting was on 10 June 2021.
- The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response [site](#) is updated regularly with relevant guidelines, trainings and resources.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan Annual Report 2019-20* has been completed and includes a progress report against the Monitoring Framework. The report is available on the WA Syphilis Outbreak Response [site](#).
- The membership in the Terms of Reference has been reviewed and now includes representatives from all seven WA Country Health Service regions as well as the Perth metropolitan area.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* is being reviewed and updated.



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

Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WA Department of Health has recently launched the HealthySexual <u>campaign</u> and a new <u>website</u>. A database of community educational syphilis and STI resources is being developed by the Prevention, Education and Community Engagement working group. The Kimberley PHU has developed and implemented a social influencers pilot program to promote syphilis education and testing through social media. Education and community engagement activities were rolled-out as part of WA Sexual Health Week. The South West PHU are developing pregnancy and syphilis resources.
Priority Area 2: Workforce development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The syphilis videoconference (VC) series is ongoing. Recent sessions have included syphilis and at-risk populations, and congenital syphilis. A Midwives-specific syphilis online learning webinar is being delivered by ASHM on 21 July 2021. The WA Department of Health has funded 13 organisations through grants to increase workforce capacity to respond to infectious syphilis. WA Country Health Service are providing funding for 10.2 FTE for staffing in outbreak regions A significant amount of training has been provided to staff in all regions including hospital staff, midwives, primary healthcare providers and community health workers. Birds and the BBVs was delivered by the Aboriginal Health Council WA in the Goldfields and the Kimberley regions. 17 participants attended the training in the Goldfields and 14 attended in the Kimberley. WACHS regional teams continue to conduct sexual health orientation with new staff. Nuts and Bolts training was delivered in the Pilbara.
Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 24 placements within the syphilis point-of-care testing program have been allocated. From July 1 2020 to 10 June 2021 there have been 198 healthcare workers trained in syphilis PoCT and 7,300 testing strips have been disseminated to services. Testing guidelines have been updated on the Silver book. Custodians of national and other state guidelines have been written to requesting alignment of testing guidelines. STI testing quick guide and syphilis quick guide have been updated to reflect updated testing guidelines for infectious syphilis in pregnant women. The Test More campaign targeting clinicians to promote increase in STI testing rates across the Kimberley continues. The Pilbara PHU are implementing the EASY project to increase testing rates in Emergency Departments. The Goldfields PHU have developed a Step by Step Syphilis Guide for the public health team.
Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kimberley Population Health Unit is developing automated reporting systems for MJSO targets.
Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congenital syphilis investigations are underway. The baby baskets program is ongoing in the Goldfields and Pilbara regions. The WA Department of Health is developing an antenatal syphilis campaign in partnership with the Aboriginal Health Council of WA and regional/remote services. The South West PHU has development a 'Stamp' to be used by General Practice Obstetricians (GPO's) when ordering serology on antenatal patients to increase access to results.



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Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
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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