



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – January 2023

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| Target audience | Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians |
| Communique no. | 15 |
| Reporting Data | As of 30 September 2022 (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. 14) was made available in August 2022.

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 30 September 2022 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

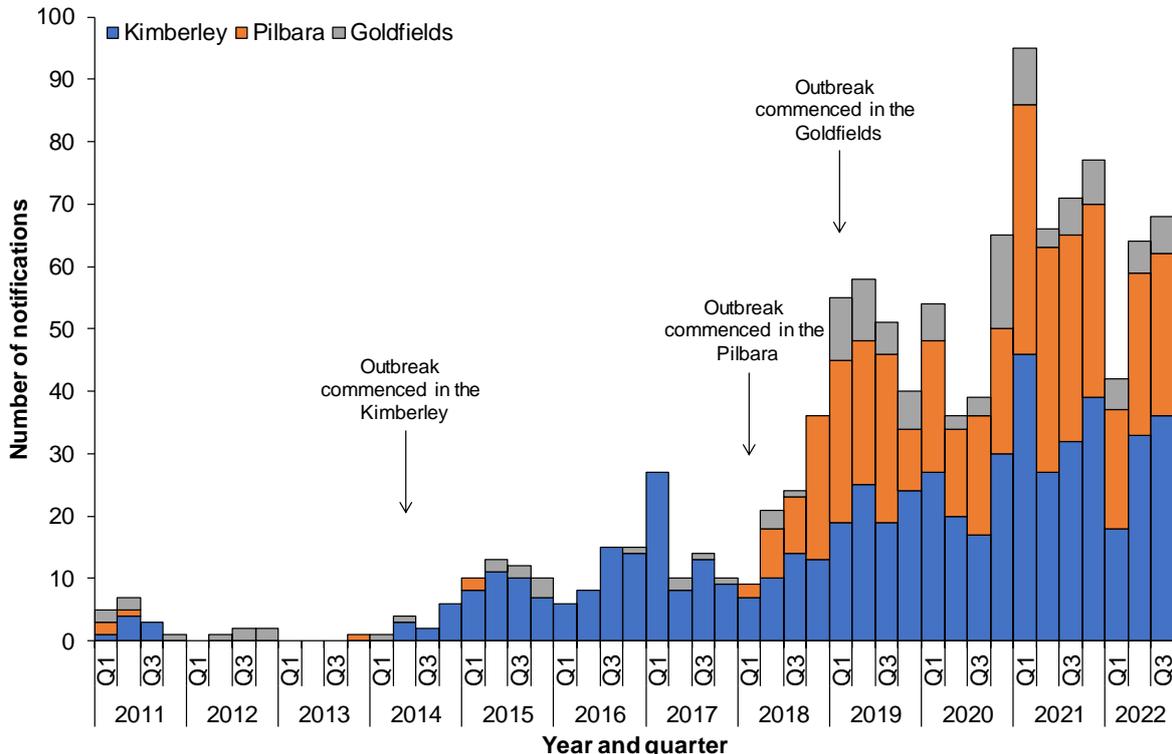


Figure 1. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people living in regions affected by the ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal communities, i.e. the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields, from 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2022.



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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 30 September 2022¹.

| | Kimberley | Pilbara | Goldfields | Total |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Characteristics | | | | |
| Outbreak commencement | Jun 2014 | Feb 2018 | Jan 2019 | Jun 2014 |
| Cases last quarter: Apr to Jun 2022 | 33 | 26 | 5 | 64 |
| Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2022 | 36 | 26 | 6 | 68 |
| Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement) | 603 | 413 | 98 | 1,114 |
| Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)* | | | | |
| 15-19 yrs | 151 (25%) | 108 (26%) | 20 (20%) | 279 (25%) |
| 20-24 yrs | 147 (24%) | 94 (23%) | 16 (16%) | 257 (23%) |
| 25-29 yrs | 77 (13%) | 58 (14%) | 24 (24%) | 159 (14%) |
| 30-34 yrs | 64 (11%) | 58 (14%) | 12 (12%) | 134 (12%) |
| 35+ yrs | 150 (25%) | 82 (20%) | 25 (26%) | 257 (23%) |
| % Cases reported by sex | | | | |
| Male | 271 (45%) | 183 (44%) | 43 (44%) | 497 (45%) |
| Female | 332 (55%) | 229 (55%) | 55 (56%) | 616 (55%) |
| Pregnant and congenital cases | | | | |
| Pregnant cases | 30 (9%) | 23 (10%) | 11 (20%) | 64 (10%) |
| Congenital cases, confirmed (probable) | 1 (0) | 2 (1) | 2 (0) | 5 (1) |
| Number of deaths in congenital cases | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Notes: * Not all age groups included

Please note that all data are provisional and subject to change due to ongoing case investigation. Case numbers are not additive across communique

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.



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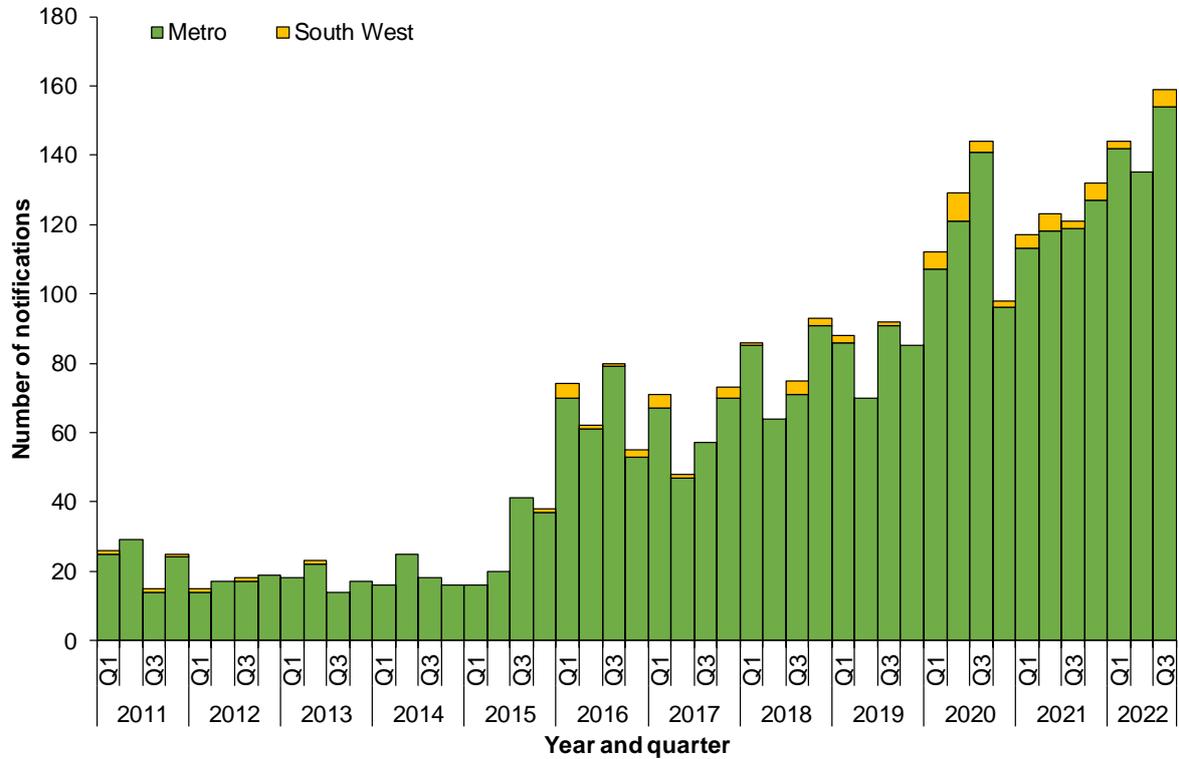


Figure 2. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Perth metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2022.



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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 30 September 2022¹.

| | Metro | South West |
|---|-------------|------------|
| Characteristics | | |
| Cases last quarter: Apr to Jun 2022 | 132 | 0 |
| Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2022 | 145 | 5 |
| Total number of cases (since June 2014) | 2,664 | 68 |
| Aboriginality | | |
| Aboriginal | 250 | 12 |
| non-Aboriginal | 2,412 | 56 |
| Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)* | | |
| 15-19 yrs | 83 (3%) | 11 (16%) |
| 20-24 yrs | 316 (12%) | 14 (21%) |
| 25-29 yrs | 500 (19%) | 8 (12%) |
| 30-34 yrs | 503 (19%) | 10 (15%) |
| 35-39 yrs | 395 (15%) | 7 (10%) |
| 40-44 yrs | 306 (11%) | 3 (4%) |
| 45+ yrs | 559 (21%) | 12 (18%) |
| % Cases reported by sex | | |
| Male | 2,196 (82%) | 46 (68%) |
| Female | 452 (17%) | 22 (32%) |
| Transgender | 16 (1%) | 0 (0%) |
| Exposure category | | |
| MSM | 1,532 (58%) | 24 (35%) |
| Heterosexual | 958 (36%) | 42 (62%) |
| Unknown | 157 (6%) | 2 (3%) |
| Pregnant and congenital cases | | |
| Pregnant cases | 55 (12%) | 1 (5%) |
| Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)~ | 4 (1) | 0 (0) |
| Number of deaths in congenital cases | 2 | 0 |

Notes: * 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; one in a non-Aboriginal person in 2021); probable (one in an Aboriginal person in 2020); deaths in congenital cases (one in an Aboriginal person in 2020; one in a non-Aboriginal person in 2021).
 Please note that all data are provisional and subject to change due to ongoing case investigation. Case numbers are not additive across communiques

Governance Update

WA SORG

- The WA SORG meets on a quarterly basis and the last two meetings were held on 14 September and 12 December 2022.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan – Progress Report* is currently awaiting approval.
- Consultations for the next iteration of the *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* were held in November 2022 with over 100 representatives from across WA attending to provide feedback.



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- Drafting of the next *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* is underway by the Communicable Disease Control Directorate.



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

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|---|
| <p>Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new syphilis posters and specific antenatal posters available on Quickmail for download or ordering. • SHQ syphilis resources available to download from the SHQ website. • AHCWA launches “Go Along Philis” syphilis flipchart resource launched and available to order on the AHCWA website. |
| <p>Priority Area 2: Workforce development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A syphilis videoconference (VC) on WA syphilis outbreak response progress was delivered in October 2022. The VC was held via Microsoft Teams and had 41 people attend. • AHCWA held a sexual health forum on 18 November 2022, with over 40 attendees from a range of WA Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. • Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Program facilitated Regional Teams Workshop in Perth on 21-22 November 2022. Fifty-nine professionals across WA health services attended the two days. • Presentation on Testing Strategies on Infectious Syphilis Outbreak delivered by Kirby Institute as part of the consultation workshops uploaded to the WA SORG website. • AHCWA facilitated Birds and the BBVs training in Perth in December 2022. |
| <p>Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work continues on the webPAS system for positive patients who have not presented for treatment. This initiative aims to assist in decreasing positive patients time to treatment and decreasing the number of patients who are lost to follow-up. • Since the beginning of the WA Syphilis Point-of-Care Test (PoCT) Program to 30 September 2022, 95 patients have returned reactive for syphilis PoCT results. |
| <p>Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a REDcap system as an interim solution to a statewide syphilis management system continues. A test version launched with all WACHS regions on 29 November 2022 to obtain feedback before commencement of a pilot at two public health units by mid-January 2023. All WACHS regions should have access by 1 March 2023 with the intention to move to a statewide implementation shortly after. • New communique template being drafted to be used for future WA SORG communiques. |
| <p>Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One public health review of case of a congenital syphilis has been completed since the previous communique. • Baby Baskets Project being rolled out in Goldfields to promote attendance to antenatal screening. |

Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
January 2023

Further information relating to the WA SORG and access to additional resources and trainings are available on the WA SORG webpage:

https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/WA-Syphilis-outbreak-response