



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – February 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>	4
<b>Reporting Data</b>	As of 31 December 2019 (current status)

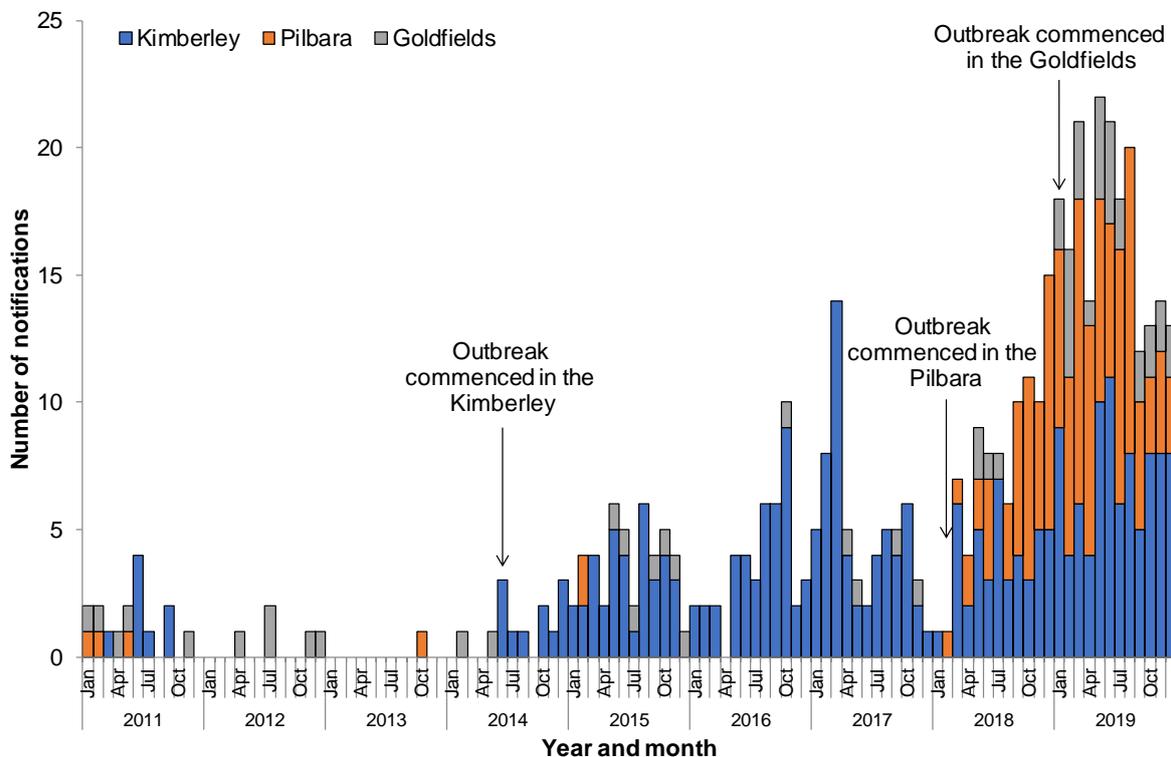
## The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group

Established in August 2018, the WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) is coordinating a state-wide response to the syphilis outbreak among Aboriginal people in the outbreak regions. 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 and Pilbara regions, and the Goldfields region as of April 2019.

This communique provides a quarterly update of the WA syphilis outbreak response; the previous Communique (no. 3) was made available in November 2019.

## Current status

The outbreak data for affected regions in WA to 31 December 2019 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 31 December 2019.



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**Table 1.** Characteristics of outbreak cases of infectious syphilis notified in regions of Western Australia, from 1 June 2014 to 31 December 2019<sup>1</sup>.

	<b>Kimberley</b>	<b>Pilbara</b>	<b>Goldfields</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases <sup>2</sup> last quarter: Jul to Sep 2019	19	27	4	50
Cases this quarter: Oct to Dec 2019	24	10	6	40
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	278	128	29	435
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	78 (28%)	41 (32%)	3 (10%)	122 (28%)
20-24 yrs	73 (26%)	28 (22%)	3 (10%)	104 (24%)
25-29 yrs	34 (12%)	19 (15%)	10 (34%)	63 (14%)
30-34 yrs	29 (10%)	17 (13%)	5 (17%)	51 (12%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	40%	45%	38%	42%
Female	60%	55%	62%	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

## Governance Update

### WA SORG

- The WA SORG meets on a quarterly basis; the WA SORG last met on 04 November 2019.
- A WA SORG meeting was held in September to coincide with the ASHM conference and included special guests from the Commonwealth Department of Health, National Aboriginal Community Control Health Organisation (NACCHO) and Flinders University
- There has been a recent increase in syphilis notifications in the Midwest and the WA SORG is monitoring this closely
- The membership in the Terms of Reference has been amended to include the Midwest Public Health Unit to attend meetings, although the Midwest region has not been declared an outbreak region.

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

<sup>2</sup> Cases defined as per the MJSO syphilis outbreak case definition. Refer to MJSO surveillance reports for further information: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-infectious-syphilis-outbreak.htm>



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**Table 2.** *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>• Use of incentives are being explored to increase testing after the Kimberley had success utilising this strategy. Incentives being explored are t-shirts, caps etc.</li> <li>• Exploring the need for educational resource flipcharts. Flipcharts are aiming to be multi-purpose, being able to be used by health workers, teachers and health promotion officers.</li> <li>• Increase in the demand for condoms in the regions.</li> <li>• Many regions received Sexual Health Week grants to be able to implement local health promotion initiatives during sexual health week. An example being the Condom Cowboy promotion and the 'We Ride Safe' campaign in the Kimberley.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 2: Workforce development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASHM online syphilis module was launched on 18 September 2019 and has been uploaded onto the WACHS Learning Management System. 144 health professionals in WA have completed the module.</li> <li>• Kimberley are developing an orientation video aiming to launch late March.</li> <li>• An SRN 2 position has been employed in each of the outbreak regions since receipt of the dedicated syphilis funding. The Kimberley PHU employed an Aboriginal Project Officer in November. The Pilbara PHU has hired 3 new male staff.</li> <li>• A short instructional video regarding administration of LA-Bicillin is being developed and will be published on the WA SORG webpage.</li> <li>• Phlebotomy courses are being planned in Goldfields to increase health worker capacity to do serology for syphilis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA specific Point of Care (PoC) testing guideline has been developed.</li> <li>• PoC testing project is currently in the procurement process. A provider request has been developed and ICPOCT at Flinders University has been invited to respond. Commencement date of this project is aiming for the start of April.</li> <li>• Phase 3 of the Commonwealth PoC testing roll out is under way with training being provided to the health services.</li> <li>• Education of clinicians is ongoing in all regions to increase opportunistic testing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation phase for the WA syphilis register is completed. This has included travel and face-to-face meetings with a variety of stakeholders in the Kimberley, Pilbara, and a visit to the Northern Territory.</li> <li>• The WA SORG Action Plan Monitoring Framework was disseminated to the WA SORG for feedback and it is now being incorporated into a final version which will be disseminated to WA SORG members for endorsement.</li> <li>• Exploring use of encrypted outlook emails to improve security for patient information sharing between DoH employees and NGOs.</li> <li>• Facilitating the updates of the WA SORG Communique; published on-line quarterly.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An information sticker to prompt and document antenatal syphilis testing for use on patient files has been developed; implementation in progress.</li> <li>• STORK has been modified to enable recording of syphilis tests at booking, 28 and 36 weeks and delivery.</li> <li>• WACHS Antenatal syphilis testing guideline has been drafted and is in the process of being approved.</li> <li>• KEMH clinical guidelines for syphilis in pregnancy and antenatal STI testing in development.</li> <li>• 'Syphilis in Pregnancy' campaign is being developed to increase awareness of the importance of regular syphilis testing during pregnancy.</li> </ul>

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Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

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On behalf of the Sexual Health & Blood-borne Virus Program, Communicable Disease Control  
Directorate  
**WA Department of Health**

**March 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)