



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – November 2019

<b>Security</b>	For the Working Group – In confidence
<b>Target audience</b>	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
<b>Communique no.</b>	3
<b>Reporting Data</b>	As of 30 September 2019 (current status)

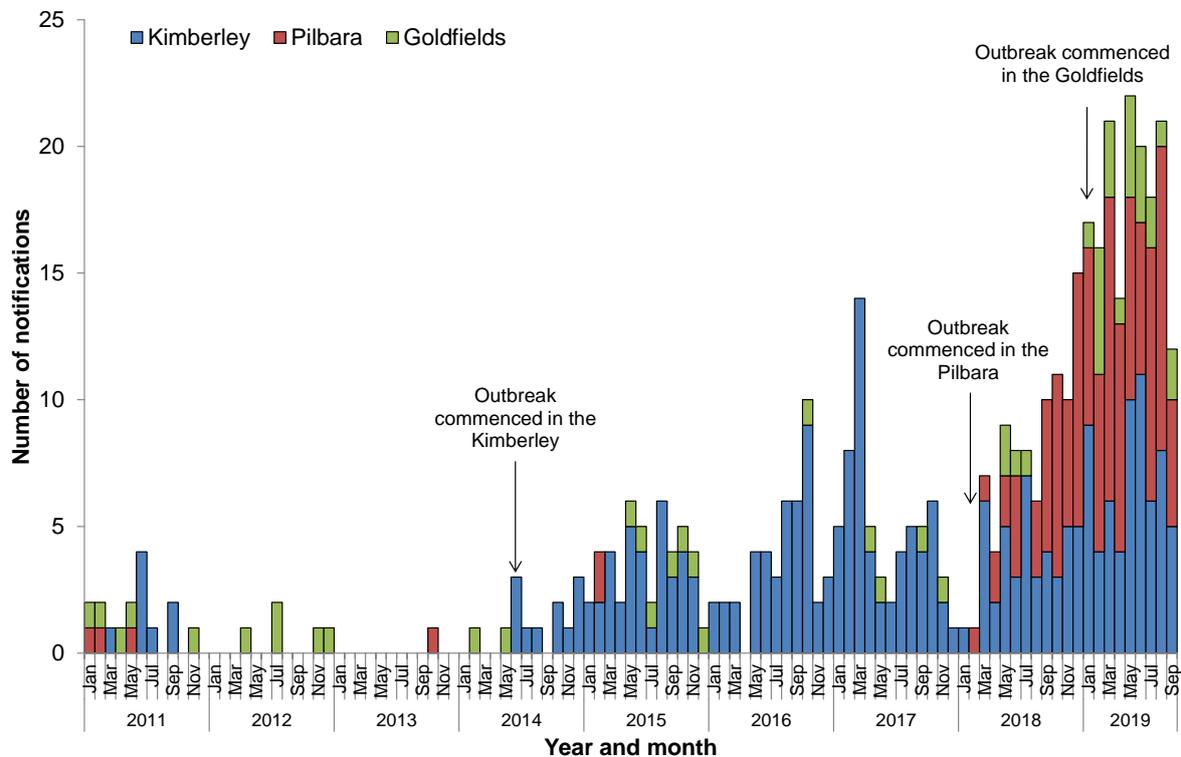
## The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group

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. 2) was made available in August 2019.

## Current status

The outbreak data for affected regions in WA to 30 September 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 30 September 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 30 September 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: Apr to Jun 2019	25	23	8	56
Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2019	19	27	5	51
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	254	118	22	394
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%) <sup>*</sup>				
15-19 yrs	77 (30%)	37 (31%)	1 (5%)	115 (29%)
20-24 yrs	68 (27%)	26 (22%)	1 (5%)	95 (24%)
25-29 yrs	28 (11%)	19 (16%)	8 (36%)	55 (14%)
30-34 yrs	27 (11%)	16 (14%)	3 (14%)	46 (12%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	40%	45%	45%	42%
Female	60%	55%	55%	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, 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

<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>• Social media training delivered in the Midwest, Pilbara, Goldfields and Kimberley.</li> <li>• Discussions with Tonic Media regarding Aboriginal Health TV are ongoing</li> <li>• Resources in development include stand-up display posters for events, condom wallets, stickers and screen savers.</li> <li>• Investigating use of incentives and availability of condoms.</li> <li>• Community education, especially in schools, is ongoing.</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.</li> <li>• Kimberley are developing an orientation video.</li> <li>• Targeted AHW training delivered in Broome, Kununurra and Halls Creek May/June 2019.</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 advertised and will be shortlisting applicants in November.</li> <li>• A short instructional video regarding administration of LA-Bicillin is being developed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of WA specific Point of Care (PoC) testing guideline in progress.</li> <li>• Registrations of Interest have been received from select government and non-government sites that were not allocated PoC testing under the Commonwealth scheme. A subcommittee is overseeing the allocation of sites and ensuring consistent protocols are in place for testing, interpretation of results, patient management, recording and reporting.</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>• The consultation phase of the scoping project for a WA syphilis register has commenced. This has included travel and face-to-face meetings with a variety of stakeholders in the Kimberley, Pilbara, and a visit to the NT.</li> <li>• The WA SORG Action Plan Monitoring Framework is being finalised.</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> </ul>

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**WA Department of Health**

**November 2019**

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)