



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – Quarter 4 2022

Distribution	Internal WA Department of Health and stakeholders
Target audience	Health workers in WA
Communique no.	16
Reporting Data	As of 31 December 2022 (current status)

Background

- The syphilis outbreak was identified in the Kimberley region in mid-2014 and a related cluster was identified in mid-2018 in the Pilbara region. Cross-border and cross-region population movement increased the spread to the adjacent Midwest and Goldfields regions.
- The Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) was formed in August 2018 to coordinate the state-wide response to the syphilis outbreak among Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.
- In 2020 the Chief Health Officer authorised a statewide public health response to infectious syphilis.
- Communiques will be prepared and distributed following each quarterly meeting of the WA SORG and aim to increase clinician awareness of the evolving syphilis outbreak in WA.



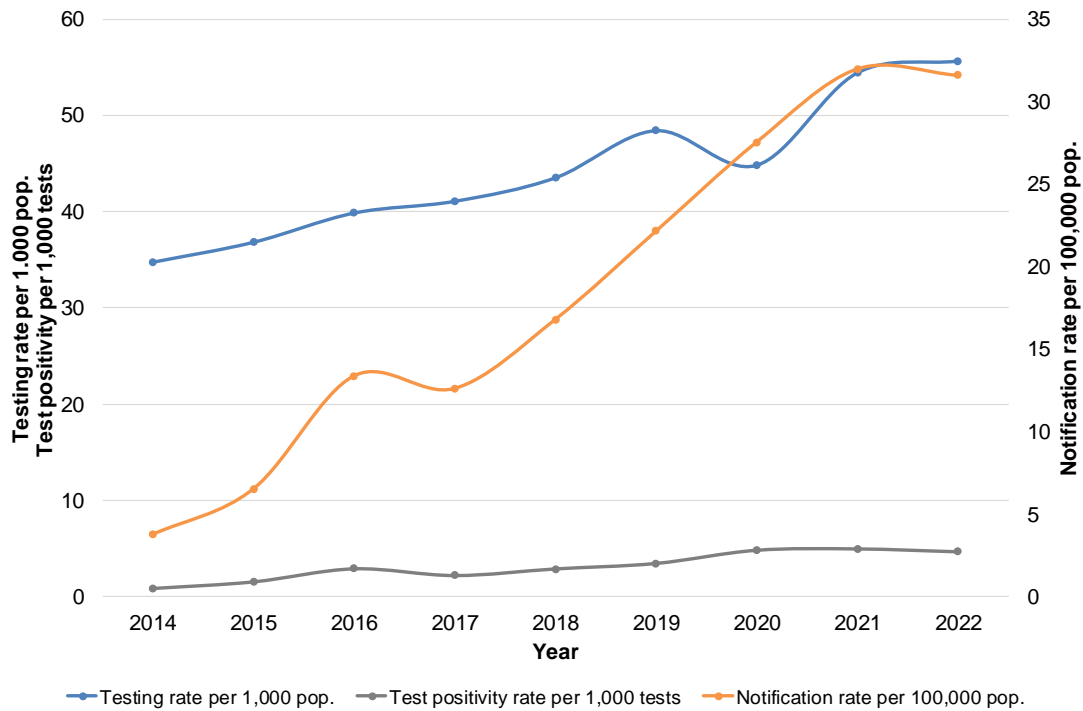
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Current status

Table 1. Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases notified in Western Australia, from 1 June 2014 to 31 December 2022.

Situation to date, 31/12/2022	To date since June 2014
Total number of cases	4,279
% Male / % Female	71% / 29%
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	11 (3)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	5

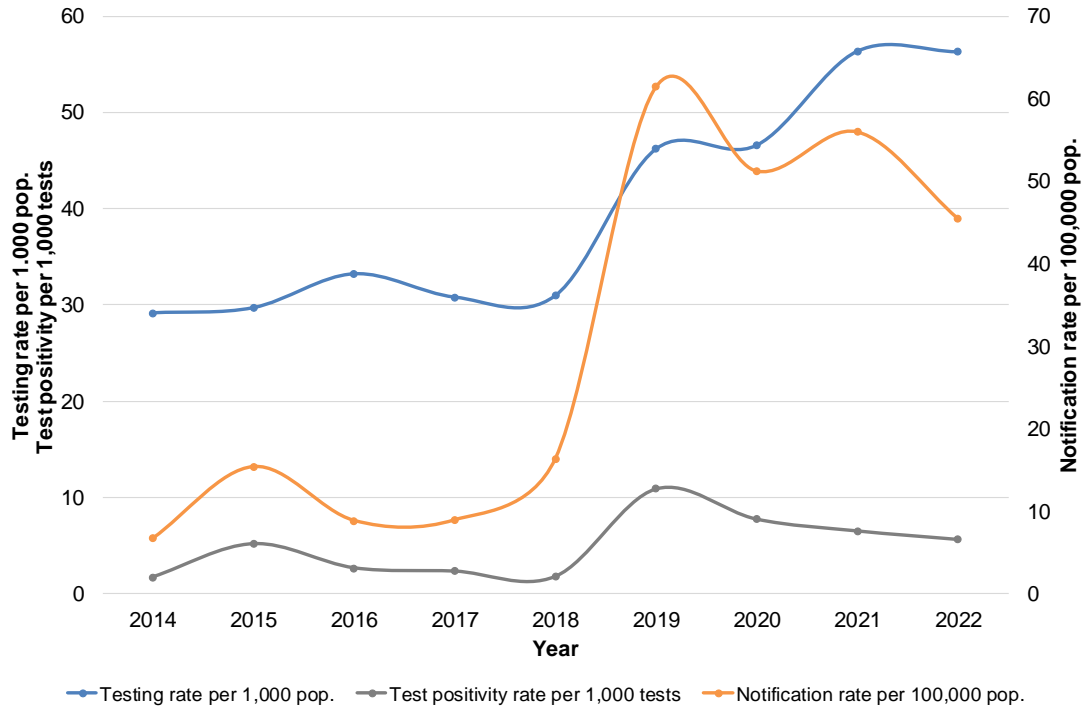
Graph 1: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in WA by time period



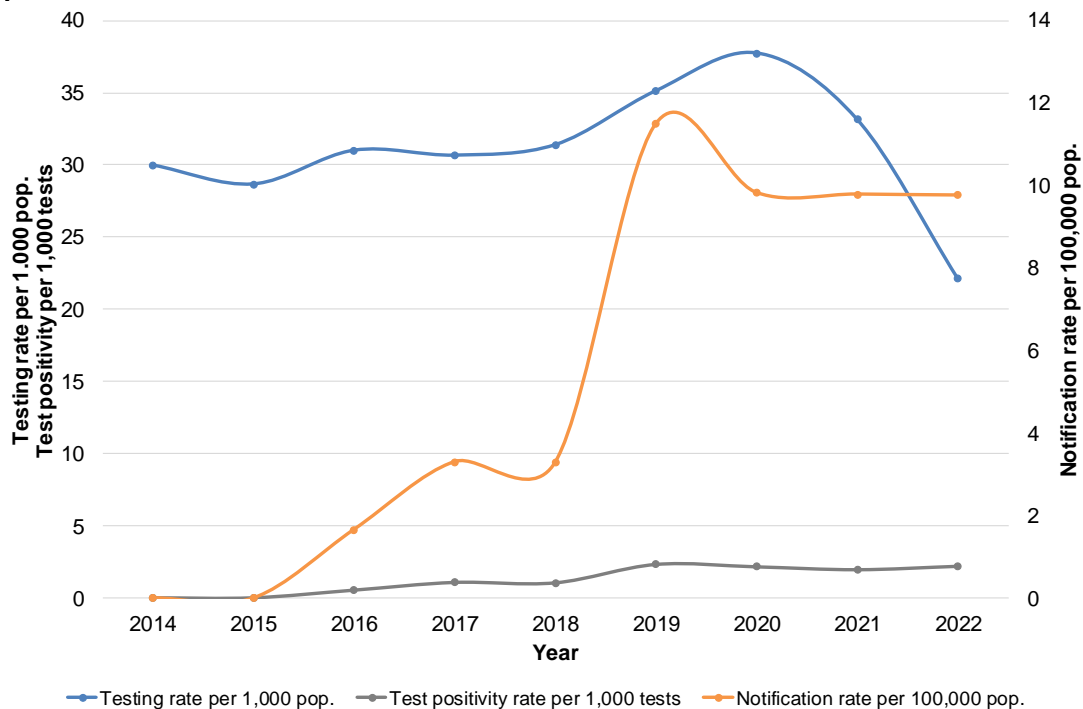


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Graph 2: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Goldfields by time period



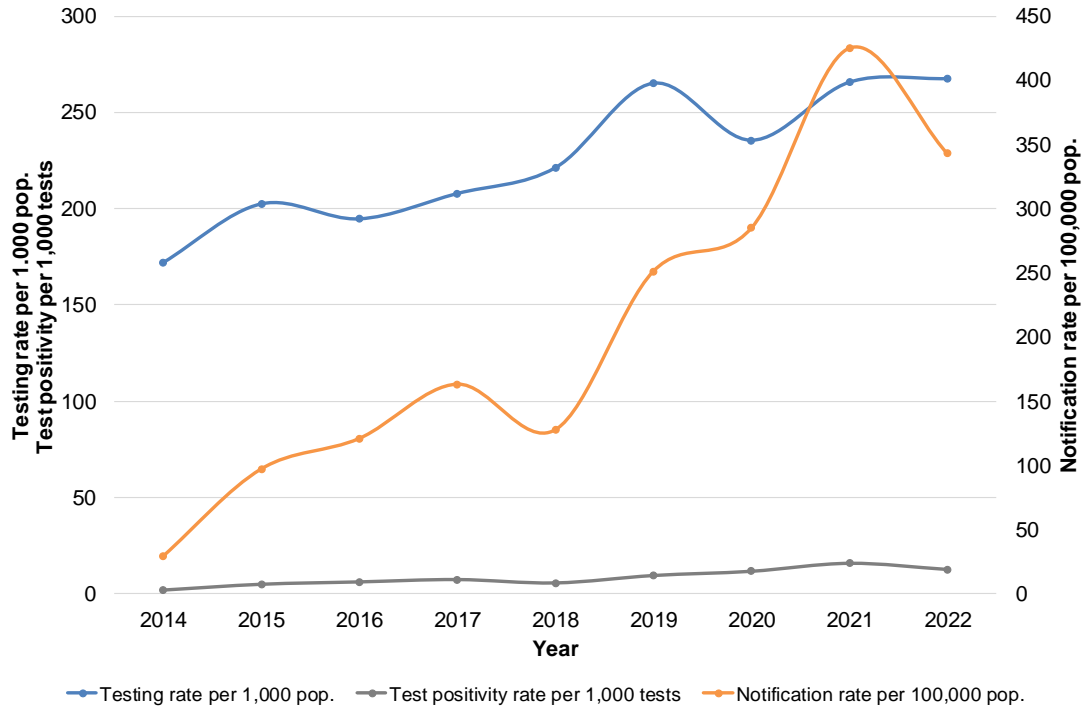
Graph 3: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Great Southern by time period



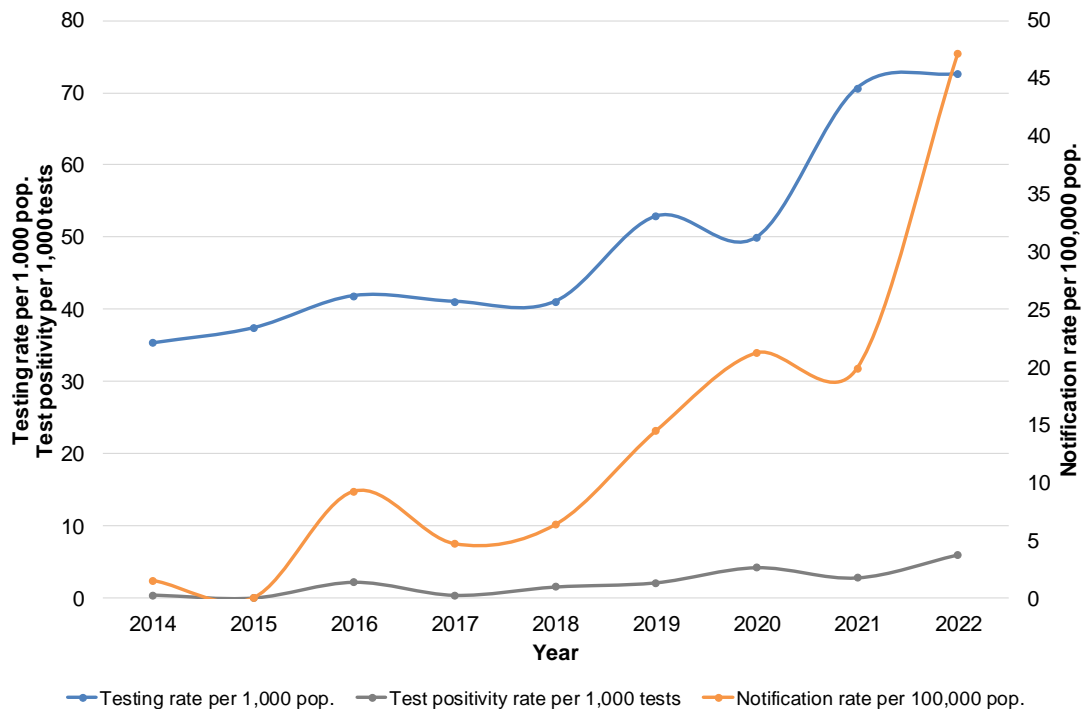


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Graph 4: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Kimberley by time period



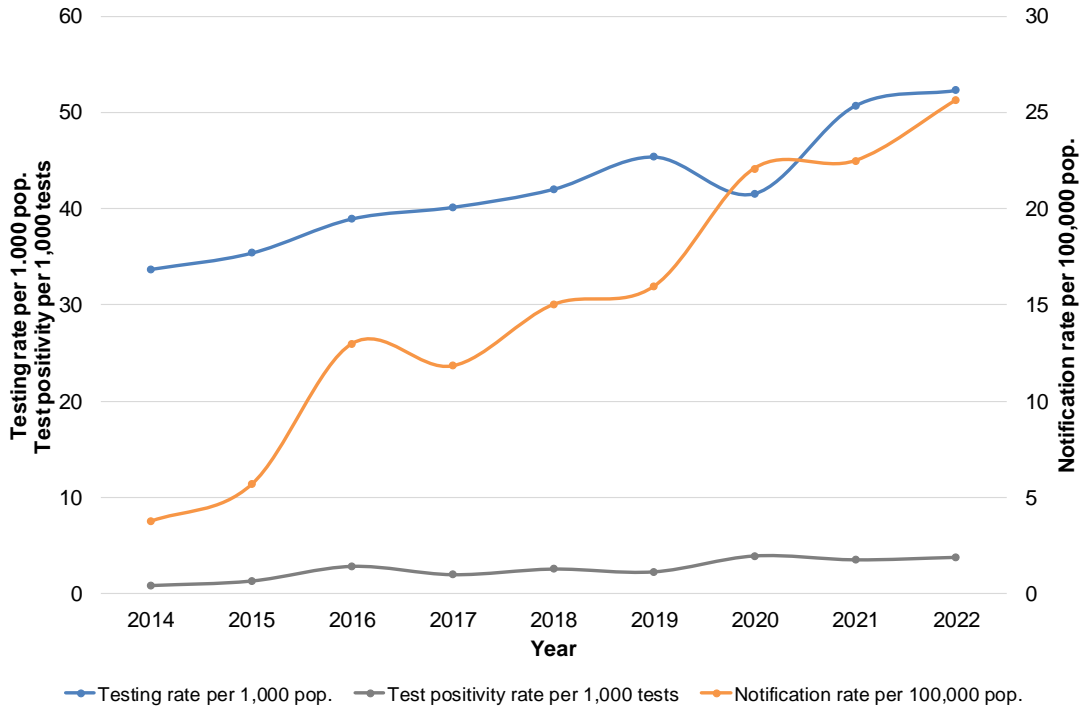
Graph 5: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Midwest by time period



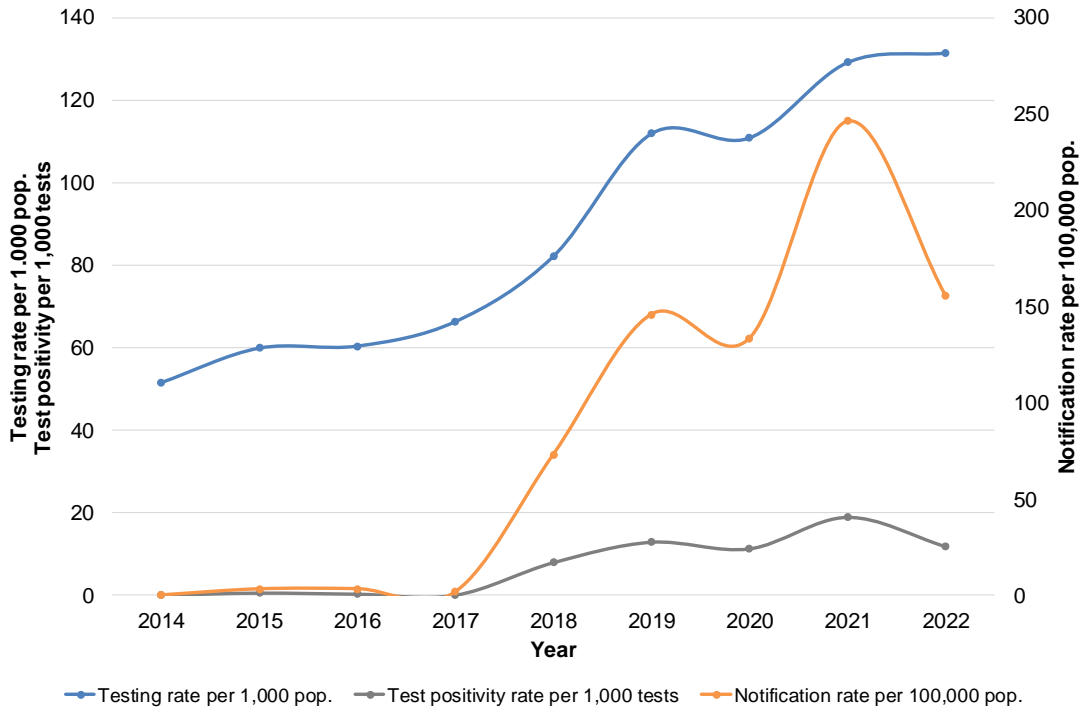


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Graph 6: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Perth metropolitan by time period



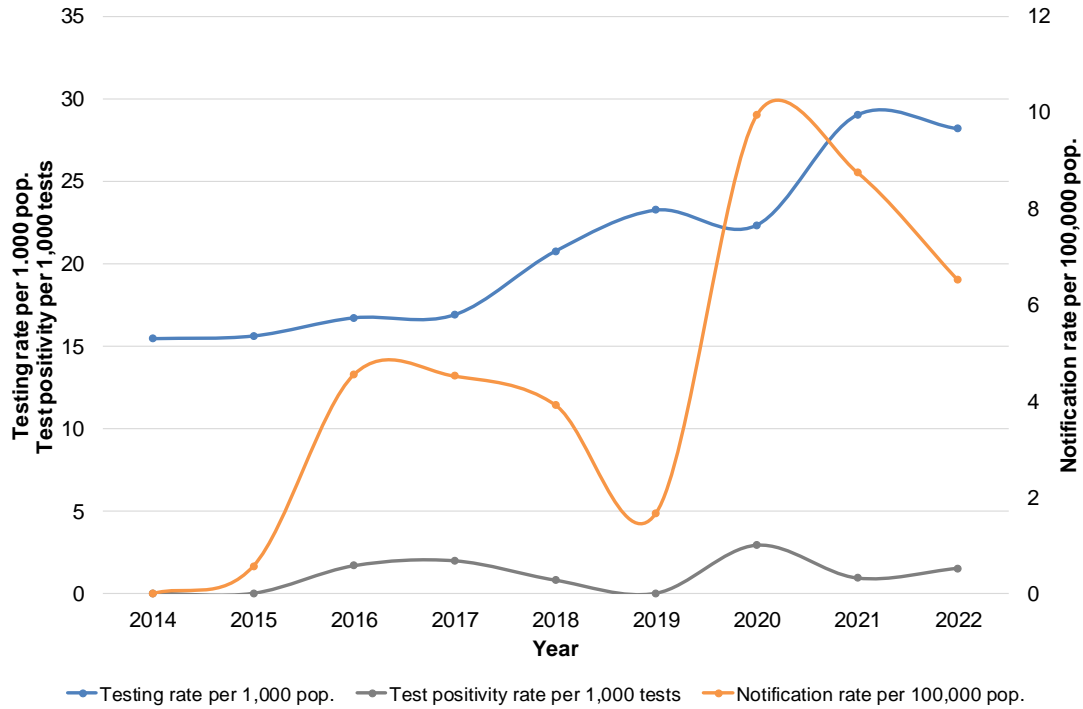
Graph 7: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Pilbara by time period (Quarter)



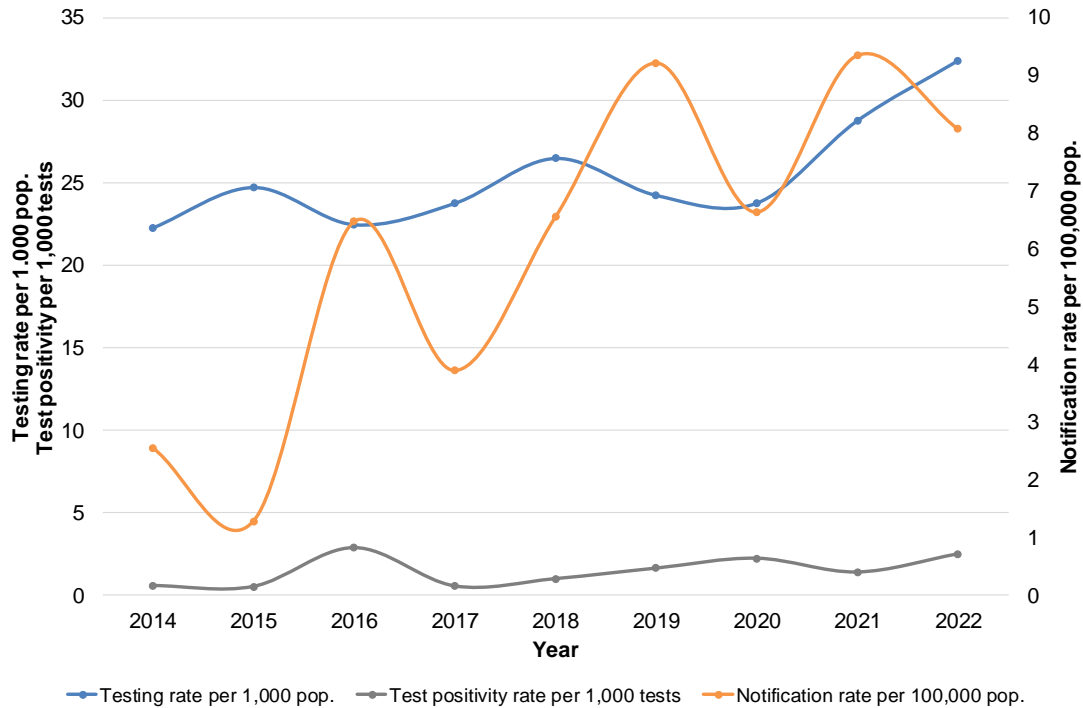


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Graph 8: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in South West by time period



Graph 9: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Wheatbelt by time period (Quarter)





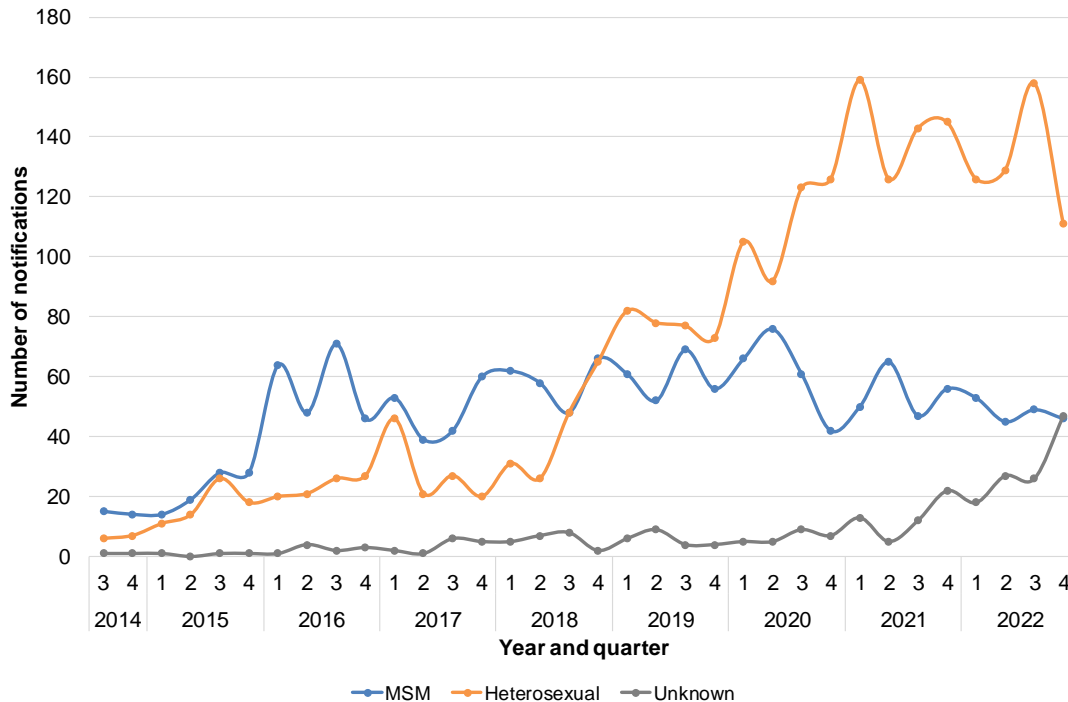
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Table 2. Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases in current reporting quarter

	This quarter	Year to date	This quarter last year
Characteristics			
Total number of cases	204	839	223
% Male / % Female	63% / 37%	63% / 36%	66% / 34%
Number of Aboriginal cases	82	352	96
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)			
15-19 yrs	14 (7%)	68 (8%)	34 (15%)
20-24 yrs	20 (10%)	128 (15%)	43 (19%)
25-29 yrs	43 (21%)	152 (18%)	29 (13%)
30-34 yrs	38 (19%)	144 (17%)	44 (20%)
35-39 yrs	33 (16%)	131 (16%)	26 (12%)
40-44 yrs	15 (7%)	71 (8%)	17 (8%)
45+ yrs	40 (20%)	140 (17%)	29 (13%)
Notifications in women of childbearing age	66	74	277
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	2	4	0
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	2	0

*Not all age groups included

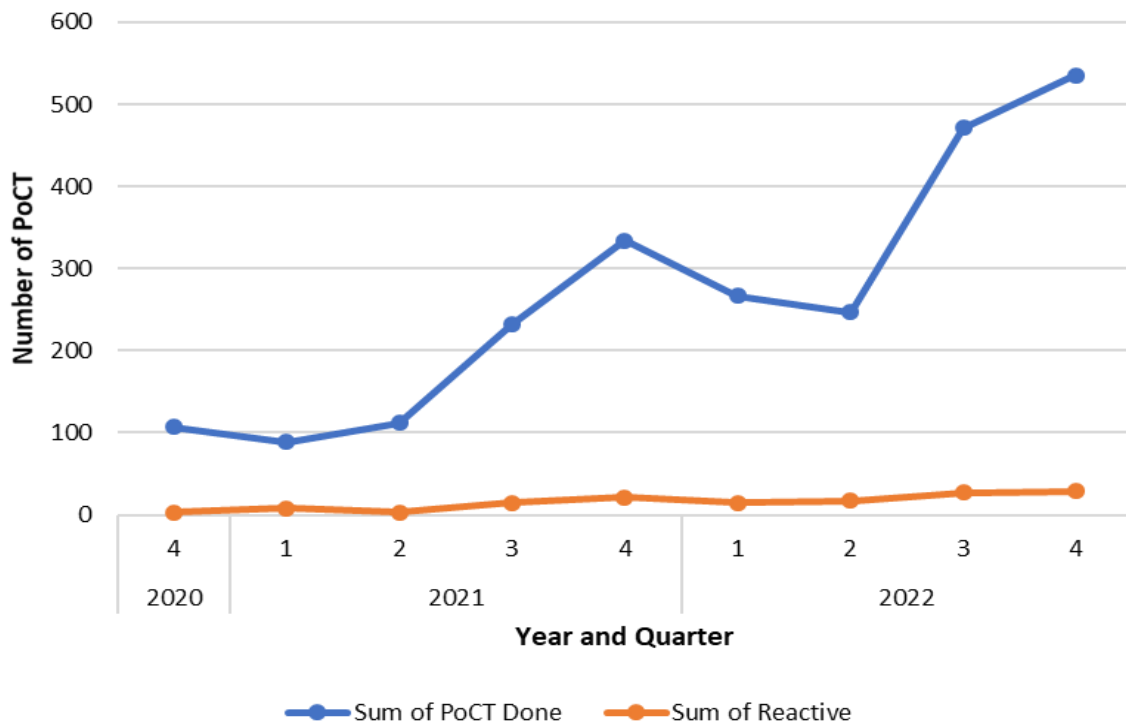
Graph 10: Number of infectious syphilis notifications in WA exposure category and time period





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Graph 11: Number of syphilis point of care tests (PoCT) and number of reactive tests to date by quarter



WA SORG Governance Update

- The WA SORG continue to meet on a quarterly basis, last meeting held on 13 March 2023.
- Marianne Wood has stepped down as co-chair of WA SORG, Kim Gates from Aboriginal Health Council of WA is new co-chair of WA SORG.
- Paul Armstrong returns as WA SORG co-chair for the Communicable Disease Control Directorate.
- All remaining WA regions to activate Syphilis Outbreak Response Teams (SORTs). Midwest SORT have already met this year with Great Southern and Wheatbelt to be activated.
- New WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan 2023-2025 in final stages of drafting process after consultation.
- Updating WA SORG Terms of Reference to reflect changes in the syphilis outbreak and group.



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Priority Areas Update

Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A new general population syphilis brochure published and available to order on Quickmail.• Quick guide for testing and treatment of syphilis infection in WA recently updated and published, available to order from Quickmail.• Local services continue to provide sexual health and syphilis education to young people and target populations in community.• New HealthySexual campaign with a syphilis focus, planned for mid-2023
Priority Area 2: Workforce development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RACGP hosted a syphilis webinar in 16 March 2023, with 87 attendees. Recording available for viewing on the RACGP webpage.• AHCWA Sexual Health Forum hosted on 17 March 2023 for WA Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, with a focus on syphilis.• Kimberley Sexual Health Form hosted on 14 – 16 February 2023 for local professionals involved in sexual health.• AHCWA The Bites series returns in 2023, more information available on the AHCWA website.• Region specific education being provided to a range of health providers including GPs, emergency department and midwives.• WAPHA received grant to support primary healthcare and GP for the syphilis response in metropolitan Perth, South West, Great Southern and Wheatbelt.
Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In quarter 4 2022, 535 PoCT tests were used for client testing and of those 29 were reactive. Since the beginning of the WA Syphilis PoCT to 31 December 2023, there have been 2678 tests used for client testing, of those 139 were reactive.• Work continues to activate WEBpas alerts for untreated and high-risk syphilis cases.• Feedback received for incentivised screening for STI, evaluation underway.
Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report on the WA syphilis outbreak response 2018-2022 has been published, available on the WA Syphilis Outbreak Response website.• New WA SORG communique template created and implemented.• REDCap syphilis management system has been piloted in the Pilbara and Midwest and now operational. Continue to implement across WA regions.
Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One public health review of a case of a congenital syphilis has been completed since the previous communique.• Birthing on Country project received ethics approval from WA Health, Ramsay Healthcare and St John of God. Expected completion December 2023.• Planning a new report on the congenital syphilis public health reviews planned for 2023.

Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
April 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