



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – September 2021

Security	For the Working Group – In confidence
Target audience	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
Communique no.	10
Reporting Data	As of 30 June 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. 9) was made available in July 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 30 June 2021 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

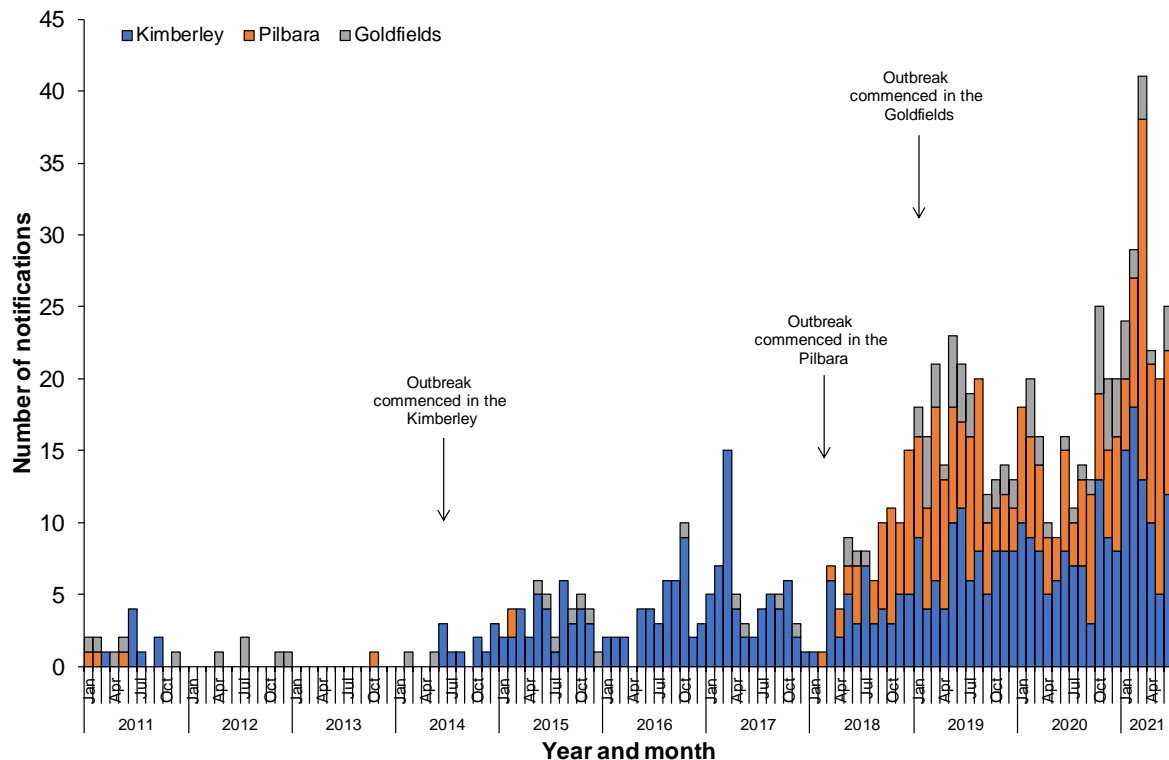


Figure 1. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people living in regions affected by the ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal communities, i.e. the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields, from 1 January 2011 to 30 June 2021.



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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 30 June 2021¹.

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields	Total
Characteristics				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases last quarter: Jan to Mar 2021	46	39	9	94
Cases this quarter: Apr to Jun 2021	27	36	4	67
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	444	276	70	790
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	106 (24%)	74 (27%)	11 (16%)	191 (24%)
20-24 yrs	108 (24%)	60 (22%)	9 (13%)	177 (22%)
25-29 yrs	64 (14%)	43 (16%)	19 (27%)	126 (16%)
30-34 yrs	50 (11%)	40 (14%)	10 (14%)	100 (13%)
35+ yrs	105 (24%)	50 (18%)	20 (29%)	175 (22%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	191 (43%)	124 (45%)	30 (43%)	345 (44%)
Female	253 (57%)	152 (55%)	40 (57%)	445 (56%)
Congenital cases				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	1 (0)	0 (1)	1 (0)	2 (1)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	0	1	1

* 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.

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



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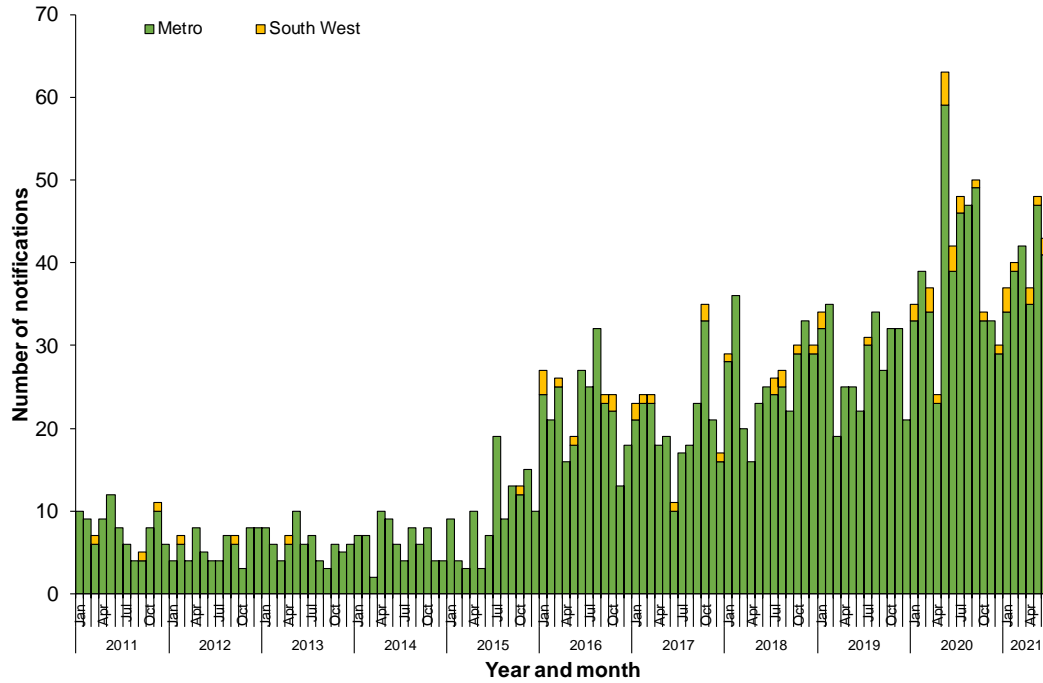


Figure 2. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Perth metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 January 2011 to 30 June 2021.



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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 June 2021.

	Metro	South West
Characteristics		
Cases last quarter: Jan to Mar 2021	115	4
Cases this quarter: Apr to Jun 2021	123	5
Total number of cases (since June 2014)	2,006	54
Aboriginality		
Aboriginal	159 (8%)	10 (19%)
non-Aboriginal	1,847 (92%)	44 (81%)
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*		
15-19 yrs	70 (3%)	10 (19%)
20-24 yrs	227 (11%)	8 (15%)
25-29 yrs	379 (19%)	7 (13%)
30-34 yrs	368 (18%)	7 (13%)
35-39 yrs	293 (15%)	6 (11%)
40-44 yrs	231 (12%)	3 (6%)
45+ yrs	436 (22%)	13 (24%)
% Cases reported by sex		
Male	1,720 (86%)	36 (67%)
Female	275 (14%)	18 (33%)
Transgender	11 (1%)	0 (0%)
Exposure category		
MSM	1,304 (65%)	18 (33%)
Heterosexual	606 (30%)	34 (63%)
Unknown	96 (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 14 September 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 2020-21* is being compiled and will include a progress report against the Monitoring Framework. The report will be available on the WA Syphilis Outbreak Response [site](#).
- The WA SORG Terms of Reference have been reviewed to reflect the state-wide membership of the WA SORG and increasing at-risk populations in WA.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* will be reviewed and updated this financial year.



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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">• A database of community educational syphilis and STI resources has been developed and all relevant resources have been uploaded to the WA SORG site. All new resources and resources under review will be uploaded on completion.• A syphilis awareness mass media campaign is being planned for roll out this financial year.• Consultation is being undertaken with street present people to help create a specific resource for people experiencing homelessness
Priority Area 2: Workforce development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The syphilis videoconference (VC) series is ongoing. The August session covered the 'Using the RISE Framework to Improve Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes'.• The WA Department of Health has offered workforce development funding to each of the eight public health units for 2021/22.• The annual Sexual Health Teams workshop will be held in Perth from 28-29 October 2021.• Birds and the BBVs was delivered by the Aboriginal Health Council WA in the Wheatbelt and Perth Metropolitan area. 13 participants attended the training in the Wheatbelt and 19 attended in the Perth Metropolitan area.
Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 22 sites are currently active in the syphilis point-of-care testing program. First round of data has been collected and is being collated to be reported to the WA SORG.• The STI Structured Administration Supply Arrangement (SASA) is currently being updated to incorporate treatment for pharyngeal gonorrhoea.• The syphilis SASA has been expanded to include midwives.
Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meetings have occurred with PathWest to resolve ongoing testing and reporting issues for syphilis and STIs more broadly. The initial meeting tabled a issues register and follow up meetings with a working group to maintain accountability for resolutions.• Syphilis Enhanced Surveillance Form (ESF) have been reviewed and a final draft has been created. Work is being undertaken to explore how ESF can be submitted electronically improve efficiency of reporting and surveillance in WA.
Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public Health Reviews of Cases of Congenital Syphilis reviews have occurred in Goldfields, Kimberley and Pilbara• The Public Health Reviews of Cases of Congenital syphilis that occurred between Jan 2019 – June 2021 have had their findings and recommendations collated into a summary report and key themes identified.• The baby baskets program is ongoing in the Goldfields and Pilbara regions. The Pilbara have had 60 women enrolled in the program and the Goldfields are still in the planning phase.• The WA Department of Health has developed materials for an antenatal syphilis campaign in partnership with the Aboriginal Health Council of WA. Marketing and media is being planned.

Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
September 2021

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