



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – August 2022

Security	For the Working Group – In confidence
Target audience	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
Communique no.	14
Reporting Data	As of 30 June 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. 13) was made available in March 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 June 2022 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

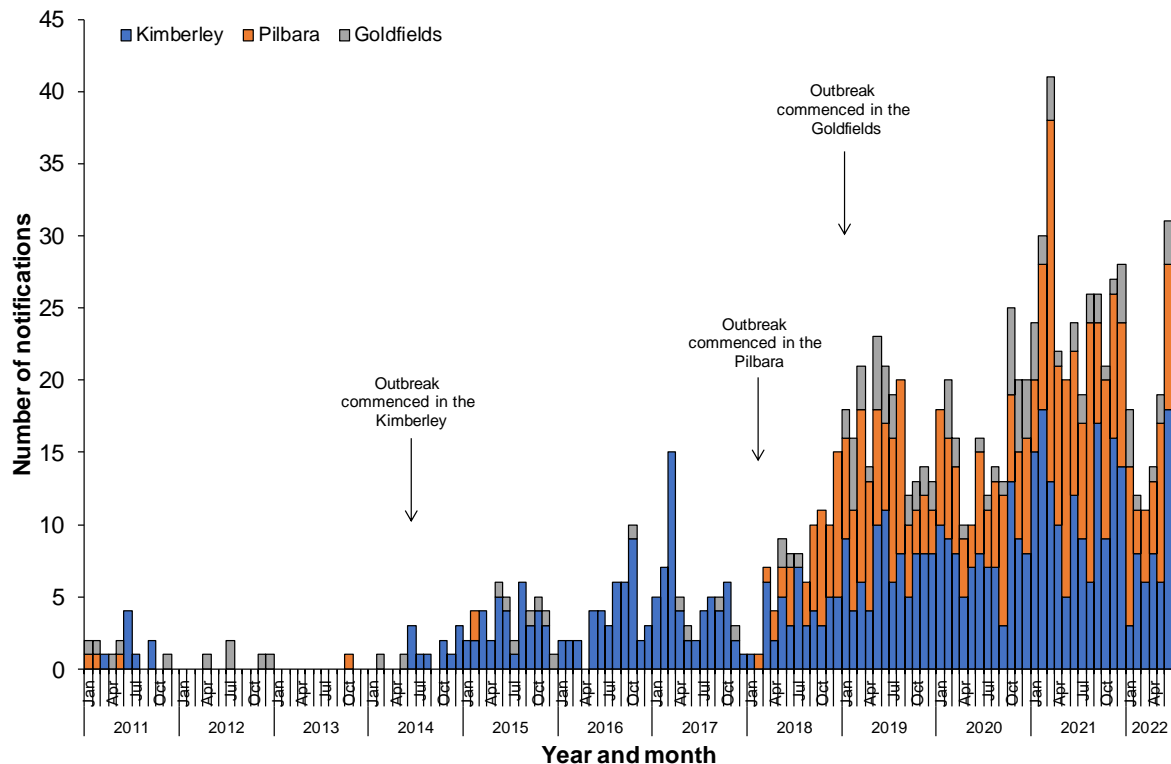


Figure 1. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people living in regions affected by the ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal communities, i.e. the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields, from 1 January 2011 to 30 June 2022.



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – August 2022

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 2022¹.

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields	Total
Characteristics				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases last quarter: Jan to Mar 2022	17	19	5	41
Cases this quarter: Apr to Jun 2022	32	26	6	64
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	565	387	92	1,044
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	142 (25%)	103 (27%)	20 (22%)	365 (25%)
20-24 yrs	138 (24%)	89 (23%)	14 (15%)	241 (23%)
25-29 yrs	73 (13%)	56 (14%)	21 (23%)	150 (14%)
30-34 yrs	63 (11%)	55 (14%)	12 (13%)	130 (12%)
35+ yrs	136 (24%)	71 (18%)	24 (26%)	231 (22%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	254 (45%)	170 (44%)	42 (46%)	466 (45%)
Female	311 (55%)	216 (56%)	50 (54%)	577 (55%)
Congenital cases				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	1 (0)	2 (1)	2 (0)	5 (1)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	1	2	3

* 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.



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – August 2022

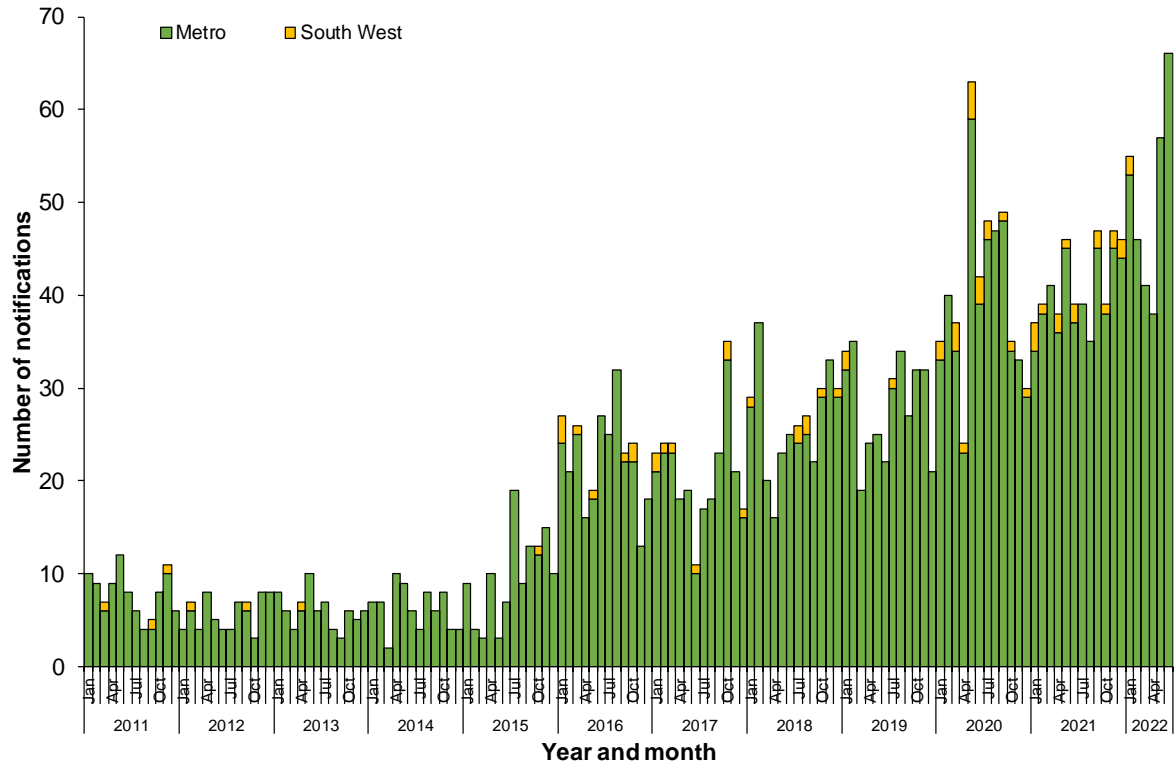


Figure 2. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Perth metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 January 2011 to 30 June 2022.



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – August 2022

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 2022.

	Metro	South West
Characteristics		
Cases last quarter: Jan to Mar 2022	140	2
Cases this quarter: Apr to Jun 2022	161	0
Total number of cases (since June 2014)	2,581	63
Aboriginality		
Aboriginal	223	10
non-Aboriginal	2,353	53
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*		
15-19 yrs	80 (3%)	10 (16%)
20-24 yrs	304 (12%)	12 (19%)
25-29 yrs	483 (19%)	8 (13%)
30-34 yrs	479 (19%)	9 (14%)
35-39 yrs	377 (15%)	6 (10%)
40-44 yrs	300 (12%)	3 (5%)
45+ yrs	556 (22%)	15 (24%)
% Cases reported by sex		
Male	2,151 (83%)	44 (68%)
Female	414 (16%)	20 (32%)
Transgender	16 (1%)	0 (0%)
Exposure category		
MSM	1,519 (59%)	24 (38%)
Heterosexual	880 (34%)	37 (59%)
Unknown	165 (6%)	2 (3%)
Congenital cases		
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)~	4 (1)	0 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	2	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; 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).

Governance Update

WA SORG

- The WA SORG meets on a quarterly basis and the last meeting was on 21 June 2022.
- The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response [site](#) is updated regularly with relevant guidelines, trainings and resources.
- 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.
- Consultation for the next iteration of the *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* is scheduled for late 2022.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan – Progress Report* is being drafted underway.



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – August 2022

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"> Two syphilis specific campaigns were in market between March and June 2022. These campaigns used Healthy Sexual creative and included syphilis awareness raising messages and syphilis in pregnancy messaging. Mediums used for the campaigns included radio, TV, cinema, outdoor media, online advertising and social media. The AHCWA syphilis flipchart has been finalised and is now available.
Priority Area 2: Workforce development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 24 June 2022 the WA Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Applied Research and Evaluation Network (SiREN) hosted their biennial Symposium which included numerous presentations on syphilis. A session on Genomic Sequencing of Syphilis in Australia was delivered in July as part of the syphilis videoconference. The V/C was held via Microsoft Teams and had 44 people attend. AHCWA are providing lunchtime sessions on Tuesdays titled <i>Birds and the BBVs Bites</i>. Topics have varied across a range of sexual health and blood-borne virus topics. AHCWA facilitated Birds and the BBVs in Perth metropolitan 14 and 15 June 2022.
Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is being undertaken to have statewide alerts included 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. The WA Syphilis Point-of-Care Test (PoCT) Program has been extended until 30 June 2023. Since the beginning of the program to 30 June 2022, 72 patients have returned reactive for syphilis PoCT results.
Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a REDcap system as an interim solution to a statewide syphilis management system is underway. The system is planned to go live 01 January 2023. The system is being established in collaboration with Kimberley Public Health Unit and Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control Directorate that already have syphilis REDcaps being utilised to assist public health management of syphilis cases. A syphilis portal has been developed by PathWest and is being piloted. System improvements are being explored make the portal faster. The portal will allow public health units to access previous testing data, creating efficiencies by minimising the need to call for pathology labs.
Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two public health reviews of cases of congenital syphilis have been completed since the previous communique. At the Midwives Notification System Reference Group meeting it was endorsed that syphilis testing and the intervals which testing occurred will be captured in the Midwives Notification System. The Midwives Notification System is expected to be updated by 01 July 2023, this provides maternity services time to update their patient management systems to capture this information.

Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
August 2022

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