



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – March 2022

<b>Security</b>	For the Working Group – In confidence
<b>Target audience</b>	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
<b>Communique no.</b>	12
<b>Reporting Data</b>	As of 31 December 2021 (current status)

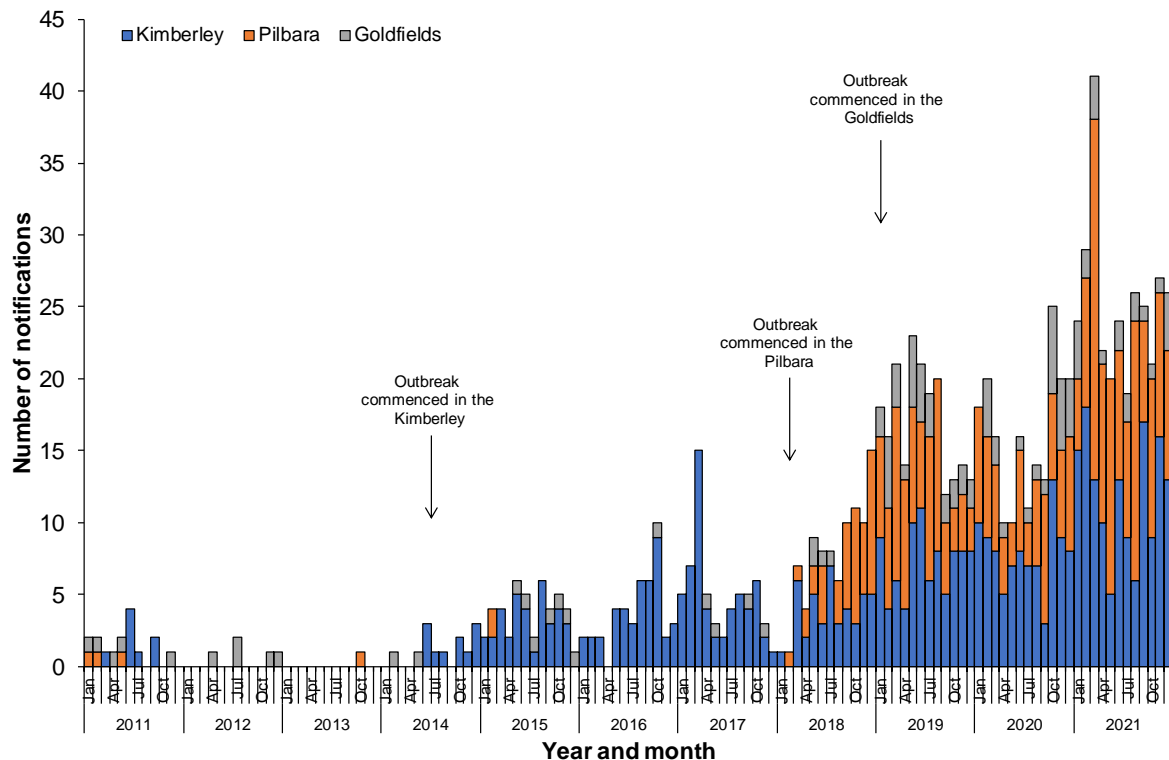
## The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG)

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. 11) was made available in December 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 31 December 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 31 December 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 31 December 2021<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 last quarter: Jul to Sep 2021	32	33	5	70
Cases this quarter: Oct to Dec 2021	38	30	6	74
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	516	338	80	934
<b>Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*</b>				
15-19 yrs	131 (25%)	91 (27%)	16 (20%)	238 (25%)
20-24 yrs	125 (24%)	79 (23%)	12 (15%)	216 (23%)
25-29 yrs	69 (13%)	47 (14%)	21 (26%)	137 (15%)
30-34 yrs	57 (11%)	49 (14%)	11 (14%)	117 (13%)
35+ yrs	122 (24%)	61 (18%)	19 (24%)	202 (22%)
<b>% Cases reported by sex</b>				
Male	222 (43%)	148 (44%)	37 (46%)	407 (44%)
Female	295 (57%)	189 (56%)	42 (53%)	526 (56%)
<b>Congenital cases</b>				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	1 (0)	2 (1)	2 (0)	5 (1)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	1	2	3

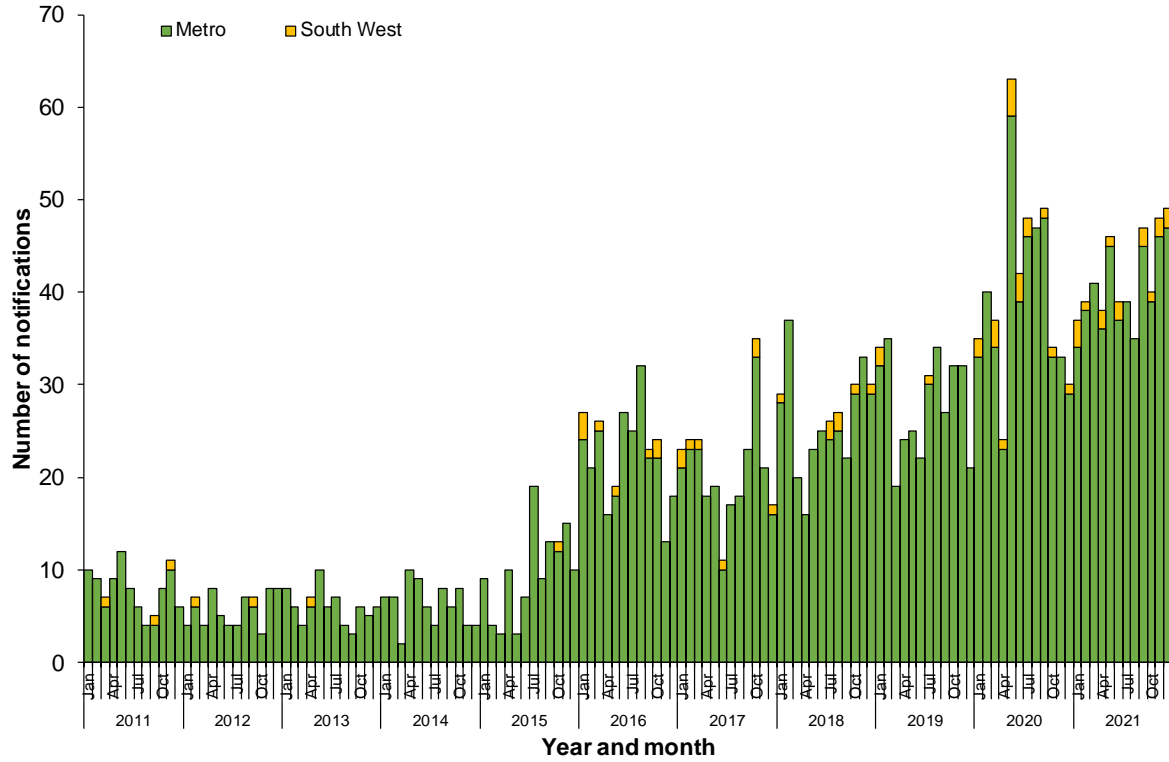
\* Not all age groups included

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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 31 December 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 31 December 2021.

	Metro	South West
<b>Characteristics</b>		
Cases last quarter: Jul to Sep 2021	119	2
Cases this quarter: Oct to Dec 2021	132	5
Total number of cases (since June 2014)	2,249	61
<b>Aboriginality</b>		
Aboriginal	185	10
non-Aboriginal	2,063	51
<b>Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*</b>		
15-19 yrs	74 (3%)	10 (16%)
20-24 yrs	260 (12%)	11 (18%)
25-29 yrs	421 (19%)	8 (13%)
30-34 yrs	418 (19%)	8 (13%)
35-39 yrs	328 (15%)	6 (10%)
40-44 yrs	266 (12%)	3 (5%)
45+ yrs	480 (21%)	15 (25%)
<b>% Cases reported by sex</b>		
Male	1,902 (85%)	43 (70%)
Female	335 (15%)	18 (30%)
Transgender	12 (1%)	0 (0%)
<b>Exposure category</b>		
MSM	1,390 (62%)	23 (38%)
Heterosexual	739 (33%)	36 (59%)
Unknown	108 (5%)	2 (3%)
<b>Congenital cases</b>		
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 10 December 2021.
- 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* has been postponed.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan Annual Report* for 2020/21 is underway.



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**Table 3.** *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* key priority area activity updates.

<b>Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Aboriginal specific brochure titled 'All About Syphilis' is being redesigned and will be available to order on Quickmail.</li> <li>The syphilis wallet cards that are co-badged with the Department of Health and the Aboriginal Health Council of WA have been redesigned with the Check, Protect, Respect branding.</li> <li>The overarching syphilis campaign concept is being finalised and will capture all priority groups. The campaign will be in market **.</li> <li>Activities were carried out by services as part of Sexual Health Week in February.</li> <li>Face to face education has been limited due to travel and COVID restrictions.</li> <li>The AHCWA syphilis flipchart has gone through focus testing and is awaiting sign-off.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority Area 2: Workforce development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department of Health has developed a new flyer to promote the suite of ASHM training modules that relate to syphilis. The flyer is available to order on Quickmail.</li> <li>A session on Syphilis Training and Resources was delivered in January as part of the syphilis videoconference. 2 sessions will be delivered in March on Syphilis Treatment and the Assessment and Management of Congenital Syphilis in Children.</li> <li>AHCWA are providing lunchtime sessions titled Birds and the BBVs Bites and planning the next Sexual Health Forum for 25 March.</li> <li>Meetings have been held with key stakeholders such as WAPHA, RACGP and WAGPET to discuss strategies to improve engagement with GPs.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1036 PoCT have been reported being used for patient care. 54 PoCT have been reactive, 66 have unknown reactivity as results were not collected at the time</li> <li>Contact tracing continues to be challenging and ongoing work is required to liaise with other regions and other jurisdictions to find named contacts.</li> <li>Use of recall systems are working well in services.</li> <li>The Silverbook and Quick Guides are being reviewed and updated.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of the REDCap system as an interim solution while waiting for state-wide database. Delays in project due to COVID priorities. Would include retrospective data. Working with PathWest to have pathology data feeding into the system.</li> <li>Working on webPAS system to generate state-wide alerts for syphilis as a means of contact tracing and treating transient clients.</li> <li>Investigating the development of a PathWest portal to give public health units access to previous testing data and information to improve efficiency by minimising calling for pathology labs.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One public health case review has occurred YTD in 2022</li> <li>Updates to midwife notification system are in progress hopefully to be in place by mid-year. Moving from STORK to ATHENA which can capture 6 weeks post-partum.</li> </ul>

**Prepared by:**

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group  
March 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](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/WA-Syphilis-outbreak-response)