



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – December 2021

Security	For the Working Group – In confidence
Target audience	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
Communique no.	11
Reporting Data	As of 30 September 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. 10) was made available in September 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 September 2021 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

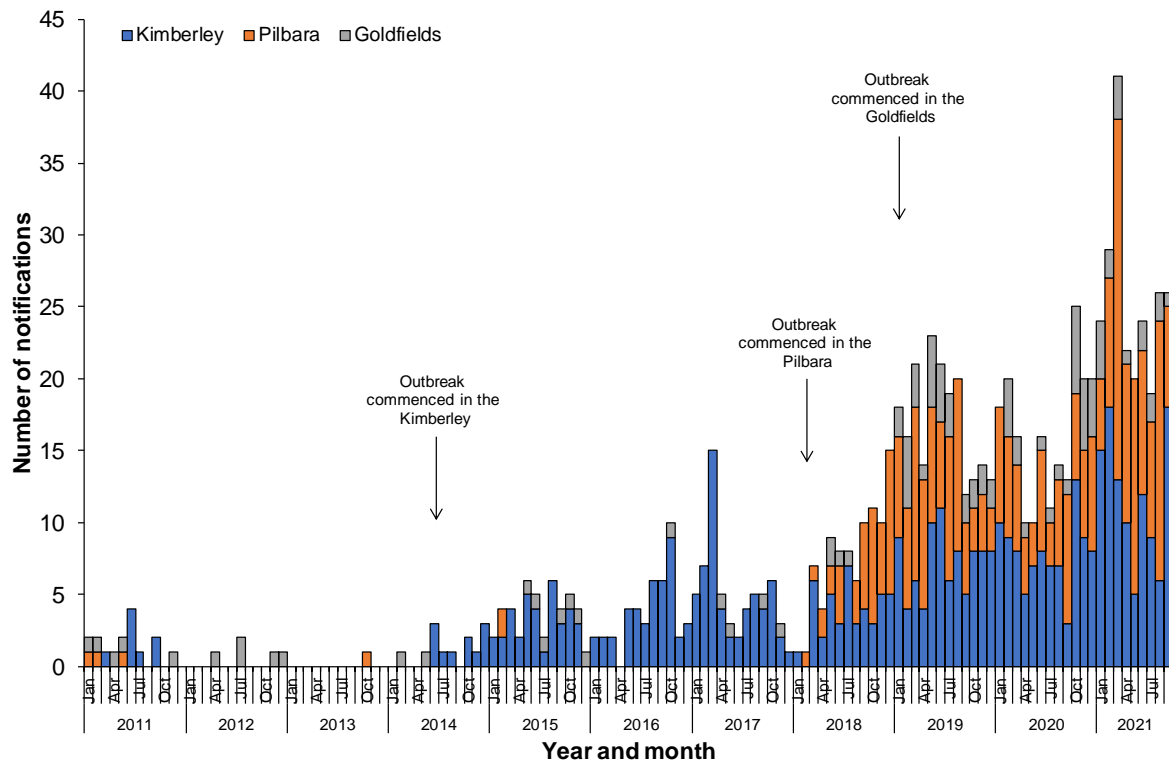


Figure 1. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people living in regions affected by the ongoing outbreak in Aboriginal communities, i.e. the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields, from 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2021.



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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 September 2021¹.

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields	Total
Characteristics				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases last quarter: Apr to Jun 2021	27	36	3	66
Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2021	33	33	5	71
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	478	309	74	861
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	115 (24%)	83 (27%)	13 (18%)	211 (25%)
20-24 yrs	115 (24%)	68 (22%)	10 (14%)	193 (22%)
25-29 yrs	69 (14%)	45 (15%)	20 (27%)	134 (16%)
30-34 yrs	54 (11%)	44 (14%)	11 (15%)	109 (13%)
35+ yrs	114 (24%)	58 (19%)	19 (26%)	191 (22%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	206 (43%)	138 (45%)	32 (43%)	376 (44%)
Female	272 (57%)	170 (55%)	42 (57%)	484 (56%)
Congenital cases				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	1 (0)	1 (1)	1 (0)	3 (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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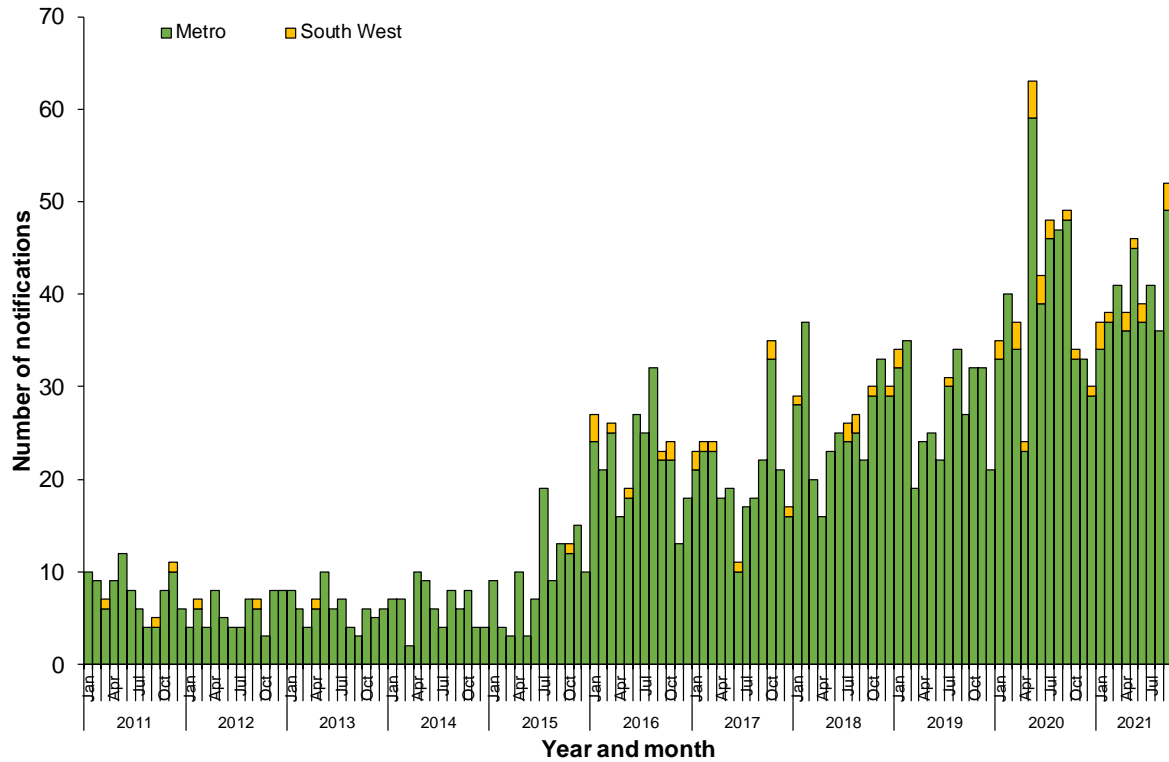


Figure 2. Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Perth metropolitan and South West regions of WA, from 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2021.



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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 September 2021.

	Metro	South West
Characteristics		
Cases last quarter: Apr to Jun 2021	118	5
Cases this quarter: Jul to Sep 2021	126	3
Total number of cases (since June 2014)	2,124	57
Aboriginality		
Aboriginal	169	10
non-Aboriginal	1,955	47
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*		
15-19 yrs	71 (3%)	10 (18%)
20-24 yrs	241 (11%)	10 (18%)
25-29 yrs	398 (19%)	7 (12%)
30-34 yrs	389 (18%)	7 (12%)
35-39 yrs	310 (15%)	6 (11%)
40-44 yrs	254 (12%)	3 (5%)
45+ yrs	459 (22%)	14 (25%)
% Cases reported by sex		
Male	1,801 (85%)	39 (68%)
Female	312 (15%)	18 (32%)
Transgender	11 (1%)	0 (0%)
Exposure category		
MSM	1,344 (63%)	20 (35%)
Heterosexual	683 (32%)	33 (58%)
Unknown	97 (5%)	4 (7%)
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 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.
- The *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* will be reviewed and updated in early 2022.
- Work has commenced on the next *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* for 2020/21.



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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"> The HealthySexual campaign has been used as the basis for education in the Goldfields. Syphilis messages are being aired on local radio regularly in the Kimberley. Sexual health education in schools is ongoing with good participation and feedback. Syphilis and sexual health content has been developed and used in social media posts.
Priority Area 2: Workforce development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASHM have launched the Introduction to Syphilis for Midwives: Western Australia. The syphilis videoconference (VC) series is ongoing. The most recent session was delivered on the 25th of November and covered the Public Health Review of Congenital Syphilis Cases. December's session will focus on Primary Care Engagement. The annual Sexual Health Teams workshop was held in Perth from 28-29 October 2021. There were 47 participants from 24 different organisations. The Aboriginal Health Council of WA delivered a Sexual Health Forum on the 19th of November 2021, 24 staff from 11-member services. Sexual Health Orientation for all new WACHS Population Health staff included in the 90-minute Disease Control Orientation in the Kimberley.
Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kimberley is undertaking a process evaluation of the public health response to notified infectious syphilis. Walk in sexual health clinic has commenced in Newman 22 sites are currently active in the syphilis point-of-care testing (PoCT) program. The PoCT dashboard has been finalised and presented to WA SORG. A midwives specific Structured Administration Supply Arrangement (SASA) for the treatment of syphilis has been finalised and is available on the SASA website.
Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration between the bordering states syphilis registers (namely NT and SA) with the Goldfields allows for timely management of cases. A working group continue to meet with PathWest to improve efficiencies and communication between the teams that action public health management of syphilis and the pathology lab. As an interim measure, a REDCap is being created as a statewide system to help support collection of enhanced surveillance information.
Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Another congenital syphilis case was recorded in the Metropolitan area in this reporting period. This case was a still birth. The <i>Public Health Review of Congenital Syphilis Cases in WA Jan 2019 – June 2021: Summary Report</i> is completed and available on the WA SORG site. The report was presented to the WA Health Executive Committee (HEC) in October 2021 and the committee endorsed a review of antenatal care services in WA. It is anticipated that the review will commence in February 2022. A new antenatal syphilis campaign has been developed and launched. Assets include posters, social media graphics and radio. Local community midwives/O&G/antenatal services continue to meet regularly to ensure that the at risk/high risk women are monitored closely. Baby basket program continues in East Pilbara, 9 new participants added this quarter. The South West has developed 'Syphilis in Pregnancy' pamphlet and posters that have been distributed throughout the region.

Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
December 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