



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – May 2020

<b>Security</b>	For the Working Group – In confidence
<b>Target audience</b>	Syphilis Outbreak Response Stakeholders; WA SORG, clinicians
<b>Communique no.</b>	5
<b>Reporting Data</b>	As of 31 March 2020 (current status)

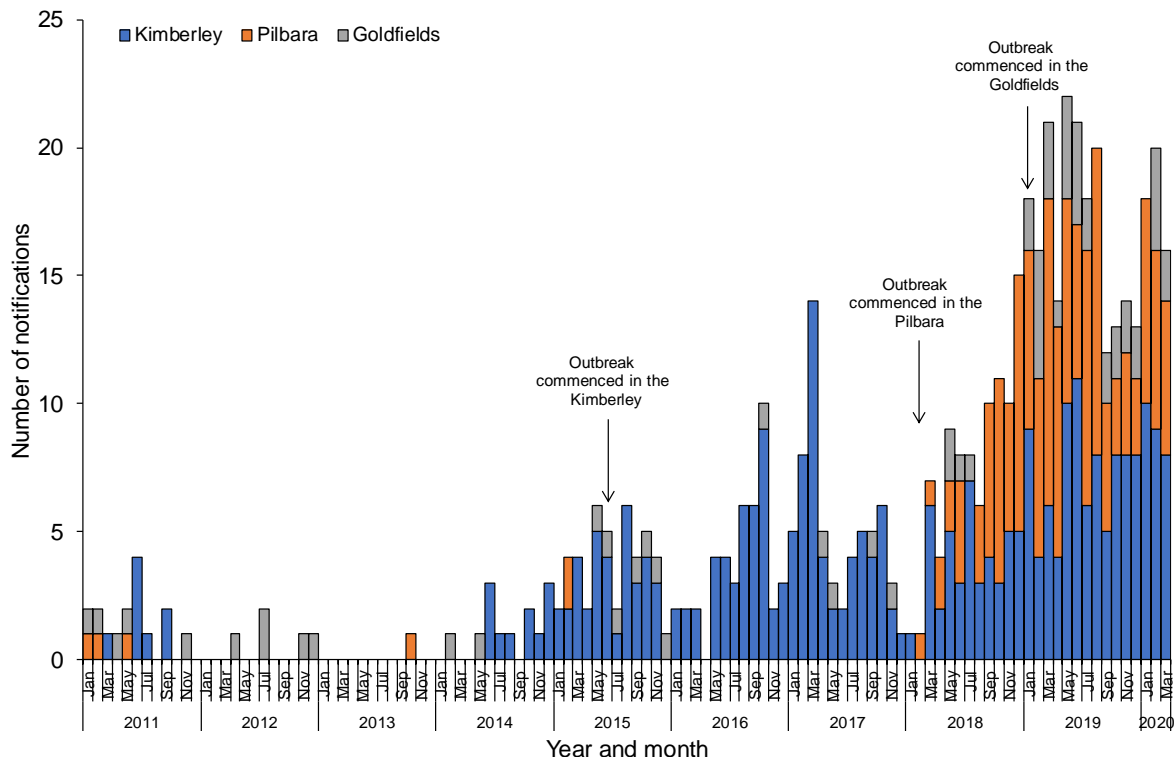
## The WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group

Established in August 2018, the WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) is coordinating a state-wide response to the syphilis outbreak among Aboriginal people in the outbreak regions. 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 and Pilbara regions, and the Goldfields region as of April 2019.

This communique provides a quarterly update of the WA syphilis outbreak response; the previous Communique (no. 4) was made available in February 2020.

## Current status

The outbreak data for affected regions in WA to 31 March 2020 are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.



**Figure 1.** Epidemic curve showing the number of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal people in affected regions in WA (Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields), from 1 January 2011 to 31 March 2020.



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – May 2020

**Table 1.** Characteristics of outbreak cases of infectious syphilis notified in regions of Western Australia, from 1 June 2014 to 31 March 2020<sup>1</sup>.

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields	Total
<b>Characteristics</b>				
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Jun 2014
Cases <sup>2</sup> last quarter: Oct to Dec 2019	24	10	6	40
Cases this quarter: Jan to Mar 2020	27	21	6	54
Total number of cases (since outbreak commencement)	305	149	35	489
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)*				
15-19 yrs	82 (27%)	46 (31%)	4 (6%)	132 (27%)
20-24 yrs	80 (26%)	32 (21%)	9 (14%)	121 (25%)
25-29 yrs	37 (12%)	24 (16%)	15 (24%)	76 (16%)
30-34 yrs	33 (11%)	21 (14%)	9 (14%)	63 (13%)
% Cases reported by sex				
Male	40%	46%	40%	42%
Female	60%	54%	60%	58%
Congenital cases				
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	0	0	0

\* Not all age groups included

## Governance Update

### WA SORG

- The WA SORG meets on a quarterly basis; the WA SORG last met on 3 March 2020.
- A WA SORG meeting was held in September to coincide with the ASHM conference and included special guests from the Commonwealth Department of Health, National Aboriginal Community Control Health Organisation (NACCHO) and Flinders University
- Despite having a period of increased diagnosis of syphilis in the Midwest in 2019 there have been no recent cases. The WA SORG continues monitor the region.

**Table 2.** 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>• Use of incentives are being explored to increase testing after the Kimberley had success utilising this strategy. Incentives being explored are t-shirts, caps etc.</li> <li>• Flipcharts are being produced by Aboriginal Health Council WA. The flipcharts are aiming to be multi-purpose, being able to be used by health workers, teachers and health promotion officers.</li> <li>• There has been an increase in the demand for condoms in the regions.</li> <li>• Many regions received Sexual Health Week grants to be able to implement local health promotion initiatives during sexual health week. An example being the Condom Cowboy promotion and the 'We Ride Safe' campaign in the Kimberley.</li> </ul>

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



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – May 2020

<b>Priority Area 2: Workforce development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ASHM online syphilis module was launched on 18 September 2019 and has been uploaded onto the WACHS Learning Management System. 176 health workers in WA have completed the module.</li><li>• A quick guide to the testing and treatment of the syphilis infection has been created. A pdf version of the guide can be found on the WA SORG website.</li><li>• A SRN position has been employed in each of the outbreak regions since receipt of the dedicated syphilis funding. The Kimberley PHU employed an Aboriginal Project Officer in November.</li><li>• A short instructional video regarding administration of LA-Bicillin has been developed and is published on the WA SORG webpage.</li></ul>
<b>Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Point-of-care (PoC) testing project is currently in the procurement process. Commencement date for this project is late June early July.</li><li>• Phase 3 of the Commonwealth PoC testing roll out is under way with training being provided to the health services.</li><li>• A video resource is being produced by WA DoH in partnership with Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service aiming to educate on effective contact tracing.</li></ul>
<b>Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The WA syphilis register options paper is completed. The options paper is to be tabled at the next WA SORG for endorsement so that procurement of a suitable ICT solution can commence.</li><li>• The WA SORG Action Plan Monitoring Framework has been endorsed by the WA SORG out of session and a complete version of the document is located on the WA SORG webpage.</li><li>• Facilitating the updates of the WA SORG Communique; published on-line quarterly.</li></ul>
<b>Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An information sticker to prompt and document antenatal syphilis testing for use on patient files has been developed.</li><li>• WACHS Antenatal syphilis testing guideline has been drafted and is in the process of being approved.</li><li>• KEMH clinical guidelines for syphilis in pregnancy and antenatal STI testing have been developed.</li><li>• 'Syphilis in Pregnancy' campaign is currently in market to increase awareness of the importance of regular syphilis testing during pregnancy.</li></ul>

**Prepared by:**

Surveillance and Reporting Working Group, WA SORG  
On behalf of the Sexual Health & Blood-borne Virus Program, Communicable Disease Control  
Directorate  
**WA Department of Health**

**May 2020**

Further information relating to the WA SORG 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)