



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Q1 2024 Communique

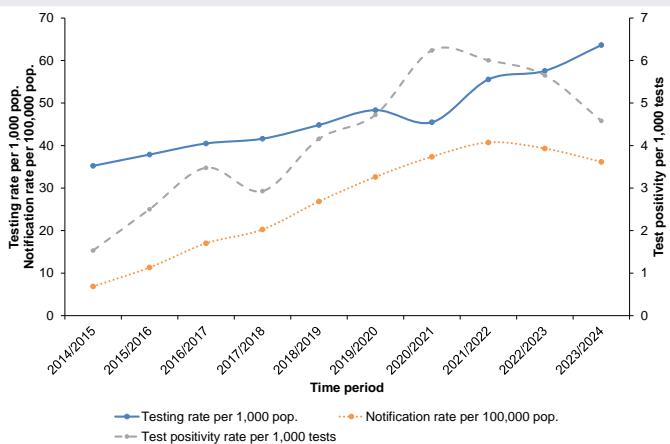
(Data for the current 12-month period from April 2023 to March 2024)

Background



- The syphilis outbreak was first identified in the Kimberley region mid-2014. Subsequently, it spread to the Pilbara, Goldfields, Midwest, metropolitan Perth and South West regions.
- The Chief Health Officer authorised a statewide public health response to infectious syphilis in 2020.
- The Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) coordinates the statewide response to infectious and congenital syphilis.

Syphilis notification rate, testing rate, and test positivity rate in WA by time period.



	21/22	23/24	Change
Testing rate/1,000 pop.	55.6	63.6	15% ▲
Notification rate/100,000 pop.	40.7	36.2	11% ▼
Test positivity/1,000 tests	6.0	4.6	24% ▼

- 2014/2015 to 2021/2022: Syphilis notification rate increased due to increased disease transmission.
- 2021/2022 to 2023/2024: Syphilis notification rate decreased due to decreased disease transmission.



- Decrease in notifications occurred across all residential areas, Aboriginal status, sex, and age groups.



- Increase in overall testing rate. Also increase in number of syphilis PoCTs and proportion of antenatal females who had a total of three syphilis tests during pregnancy.



- The exception: Syphilis increased by 32% in the rural area.



- Greatest increase in the rural area occurred in the Great Southern region due to increased disease transmission



- There were four congenital syphilis notifications in WA in the 2023/2024 period, with the last case reported in October 2023.



WA SORG Priority Areas

Priority Area 1: Community engagement, education, and prevention

Boorloo Public Health Unit created resources regarding antenatal syphilis testing and congenital syphilis – available to download on the [WA Syphilis Outbreak Response webpage](#).

Priority Area 2: Workforce development

Two syphilis lunch-n-learn videoconferences held since last WA SORG Communique. May videoconference on the changes to the syphilis PoC testing program and the June conference on the Midwest antenatal audit. The videoconferences are available to watch on the [WA Syphilis Outbreak Response webpage](#).

Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing

Indicator	2022/2023	2023/2024	% Change	Target
Number of syphilis PoC tests	1856	2533	36% ▲	-
% of symptomatic infectious syphilis cases who were treated on the first presentation to a health service	37%	47%	10% ▲	80%
% of infectious syphilis cases treated within one week of diagnosis	28%	28%	0% ■	80%
% of named contacts of syphilis cases who are treated for syphilis on the first presentation to a health service	60%	51%	-10% ▼	80%

Changes made to the syphilis PoC testing program to improve efficiencies and increase client PoC testing. New guidelines and enrolment form is available [online](#).

Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting

Updated WA SORG Communique for distribution to stakeholders.

Report on the findings of the congenital syphilis reviews expected to be published shortly.

Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care

Indicator	2022/2023	2023/2024	% Change	Target
% of women of childbearing age (15-44 years of age) whose pregnancy status is identified within 2 days of their syphilis result being known to be positive	12%	23%	11% ▲	100%

New page on syphilis in the Pregnancy Handheld Record – also available to download on the [WA Syphilis Outbreak Response webpage](#).