



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Q3 2024 Communique

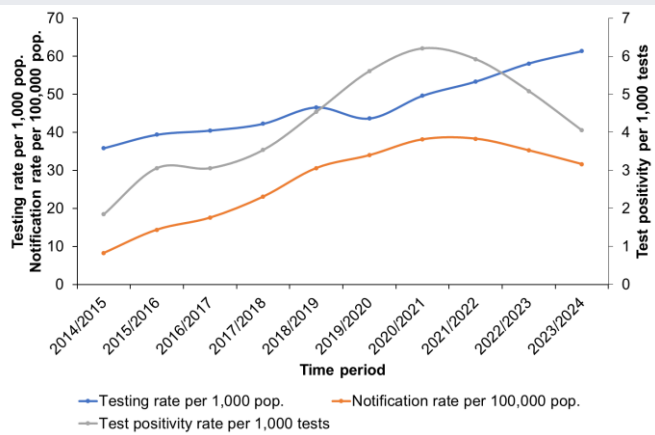
(Data for the current 12-month period from October 2023 to September 2024)

Background



- The syphilis outbreak was first identified in the Kimberley region mid-2014 and was subsequently identified in 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.



Comparison to peak	21/22	23/24	Change
Testing rate/1,000 pop.	53.3	61.3	15% ▲
Notification rate/100,000 pop.	38.3	31.6	17% ▼
Test positivity/1,000 tests	5.9	4.1	32% ▼

- 14/15 to 21/22: Notification rate ▲ due to ▲ disease transmission and to a lesser extent ▲ testing.
- 21/22 to 23/24: After peaking in 21/22, notification rate ▼ due to ▼ disease transmission, despite ▲ testing.

In the period from 2021/2022 to 2023/2024:



- Decrease in notifications occurred across Aboriginality, sex, age groups and exposure categories.



- 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.



- Greatest increase in syphilis notifications occurred in the Goldfields 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 Updates

(Data for the current 12-month period from October 2023 to September 2024)

Priority Area 1: Community engagement, education, and prevention

Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service contracting community representatives to accompany staff during outreach across the Pilbara.

Priority Area 2: Workforce development

[Birds and the BBVs](#) training on 10th & 11th December 2024 in metropolitan Perth.

Next Regional Sexual Health Teams Training occurring on 4th & 5th March 2025.

Syphilis video conference on syphilis specimen collection uploaded to the [WA Syphilis Outbreak Response webpage](#)

Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing

Indicator	Trend (target in red)	22/23	23/24	% Change	Target
Number of syphilis PoC tests (data to end Q3 2024)		2425	2194	-10% ▼	-
% of symptomatic infectious syphilis cases who were treated on the first presentation to a health service		41%	56%	15% ▲	80%
% of infectious syphilis cases treated within one week of diagnosis		28%	24%	-4% ■	80%
% of named contacts of syphilis cases who are treated for syphilis on the first presentation to a health service		48%	59%	11% ▲	80%

The My Health Record Working Group activated to undertake work for public health units to upload syphilis diagnosis and treatment plan for hard-to-find cases

Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting

WA SORG and Syphilis Outbreak Response Team Terms of Reference being reviewed.

WA SORG reporting targets to be reviewed and updated.

Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care

Indicator	Trend (target in red)	22/23	23/24	% 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		21%	23%	2% ■	100%

Congenital syphilis public health review completed in September 2024 on a near-miss case notified in metropolitan Perth.



WA SORG Communique Data Considerations

Childbearing age	Aged between 15 and 44 years.
Notification data	Extracted from the Western Australian Notifiable Infectious Diseases Database (WANIDD).
Notification rate	Crude rate calculated by dividing the number of notifications by the population. Not adjusted for age or other factors. Expressed per 100,000 population.
Pathology testing data	Between 2014 and 2023, data on the number of tests undertaken for syphilis in WA was provided by five pathology laboratories. During this period, 77% of syphilis notifications in WA were from these five laboratories. One laboratory that does not contribute testing data is a significant service provider in the metropolitan and South West regions, therefore resulting in an underestimation of the number of tests and testing rates in WA. There are insufficient data to quantify the magnitude of this underestimation; however, absence of these data is unlikely to affect the trends in test numbers and testing rates over time.
PoC tests	Point of care test(s). The DoH syphilis PoCT program has been active since mid-2020.
Priority areas	Data sourced from the quarterly WA SORG meetings and the WA SORG Quarterly Report Dashboard.
Test positivity rate	Number of positive test results (i.e. statutory notifications) from laboratories providing testing data divided by the number of tests conducted by these laboratories. Expressed per 1,000 tests.
Testing data	Provided by Australian Clinical Labs, PathWest and Western Diagnostics Pathology.
Testing rate	Crude rate calculated by dividing the number of tests by the population. Not adjusted for age or other factors. Expressed per 1,000 population.