



Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – Quarter 1 2023

Distribution	Internal WA Department of Health and stakeholders
Target audience	Health workers in WA
Communique no.	17
Reporting Data	As of 31 March 2023 (current status)

Background

- The syphilis outbreak was identified in the Kimberley region in mid-2014 and a related cluster was identified in mid-2018 in the Pilbara region. Cross-border and cross-region population movement increased the spread to the adjacent Midwest and Goldfields regions.
- The Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) was formed in August 2018 to coordinate the state-wide response to the syphilis outbreak among Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.
- In 2020 the Chief Health Officer authorised a statewide public health response to infectious syphilis.
- Communiques will be prepared and distributed following each quarterly meeting of the WA SORG and aim to increase clinician awareness of the evolving syphilis outbreak in WA.



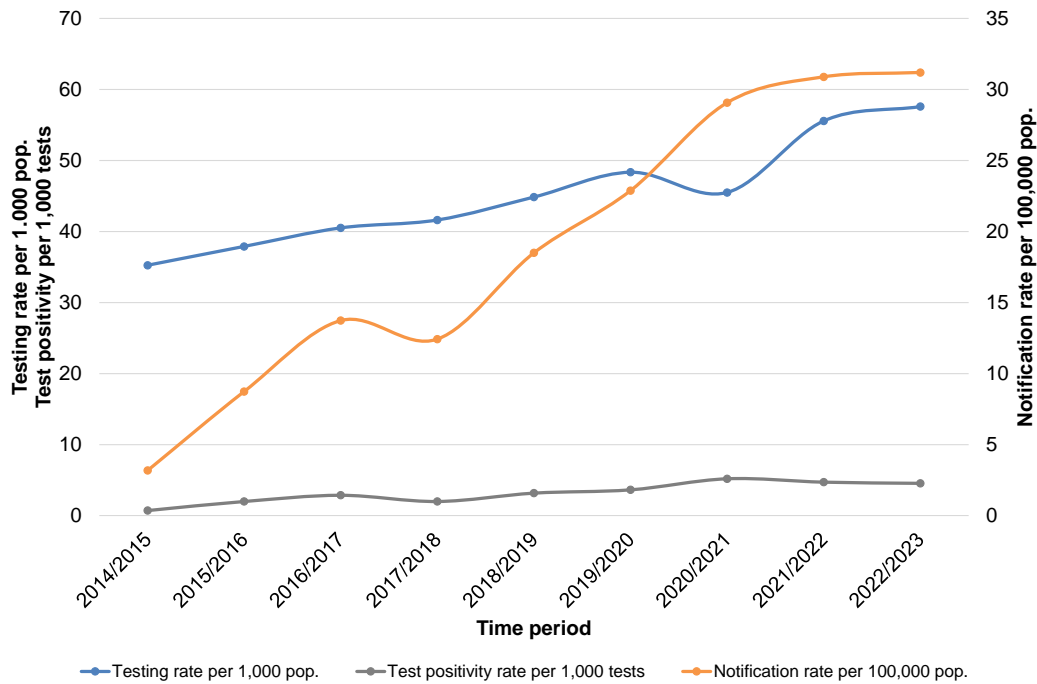
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Current status

Table 1. Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases notified in Western Australia, from 1 June 2014 to 31 March 2023.

Situation to date, 31/03/2023	To date since June 2014
Total number of cases	4,468
% Male / % Female	70% / 30%
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	11 (3)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	5

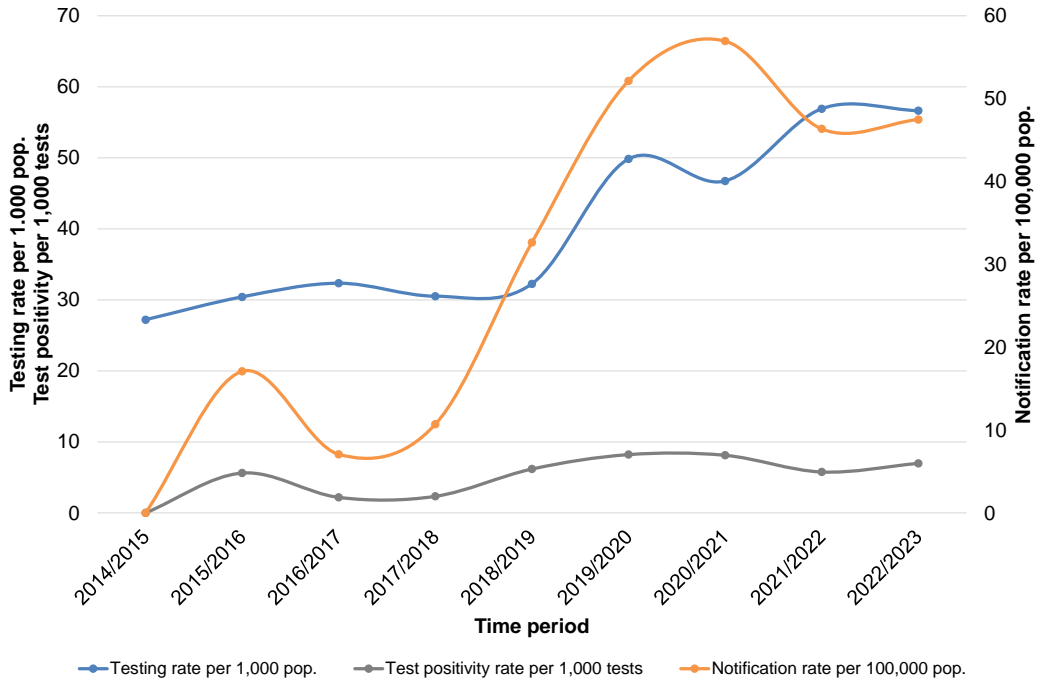
Graph 1: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in WA by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



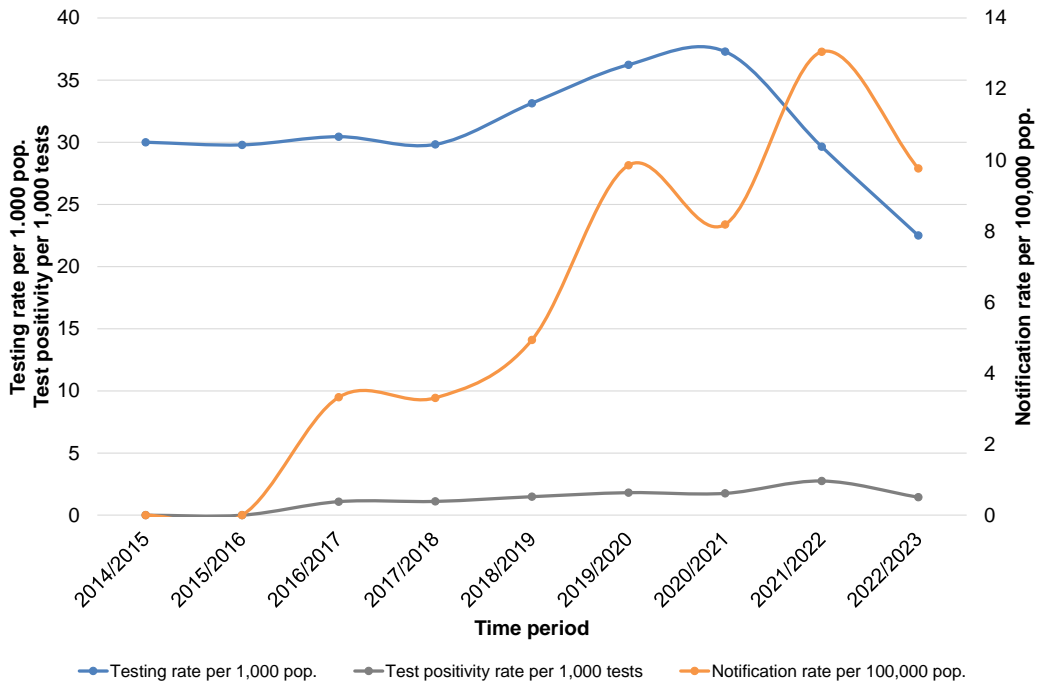


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Graph 2: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Goldfields by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



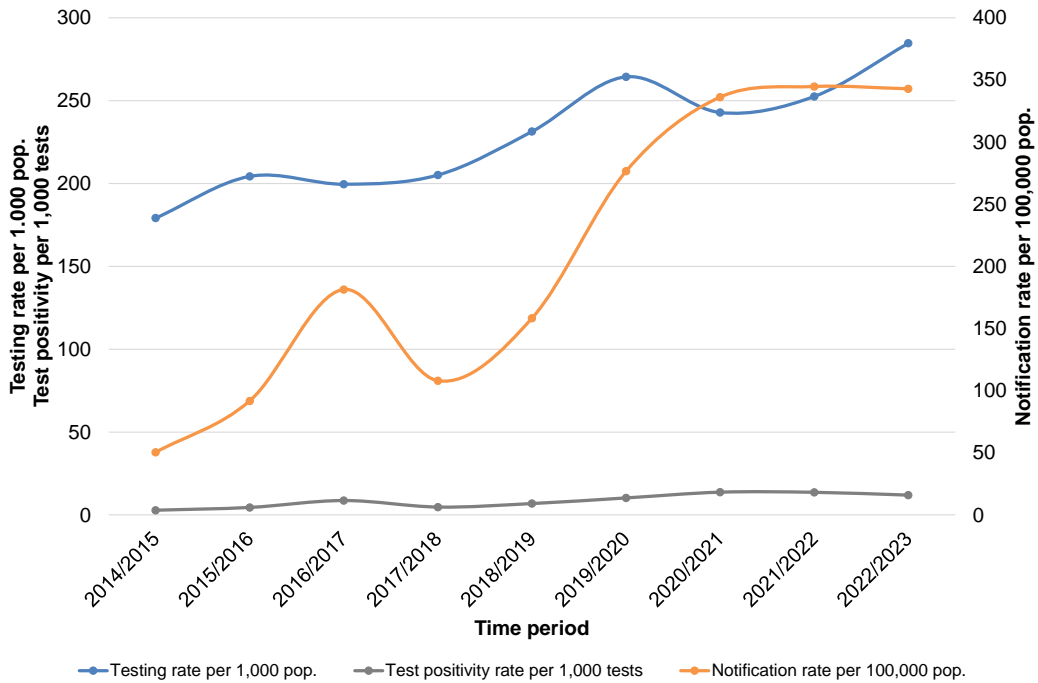
Graph 3: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Great Southern by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



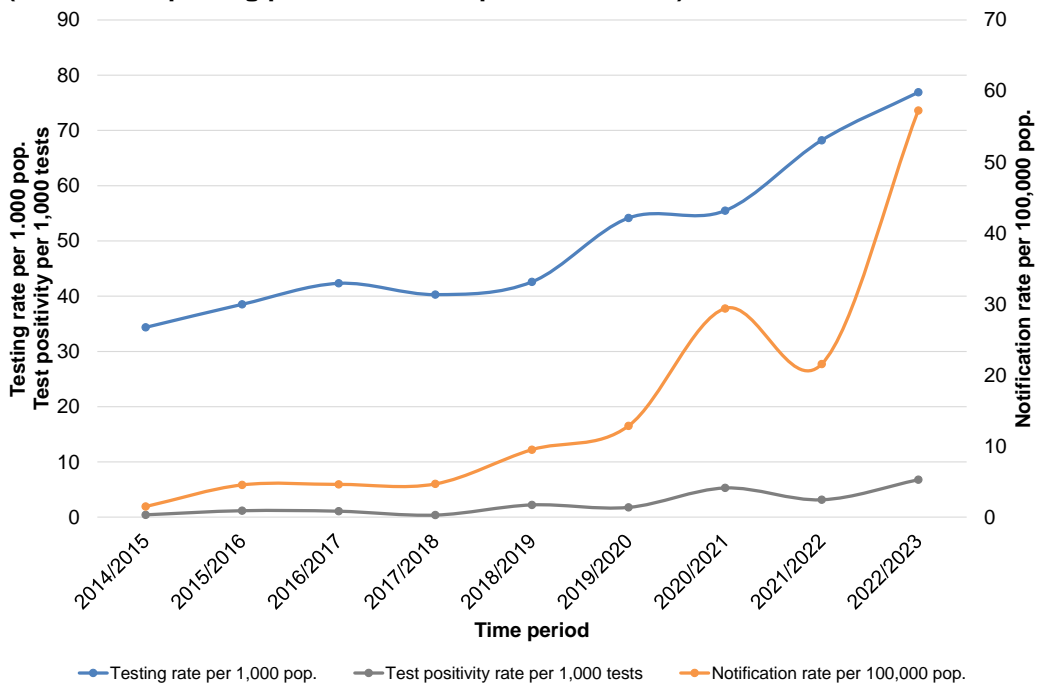


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Graph 4: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Kimberley by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



Graph 5: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Midwest by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)

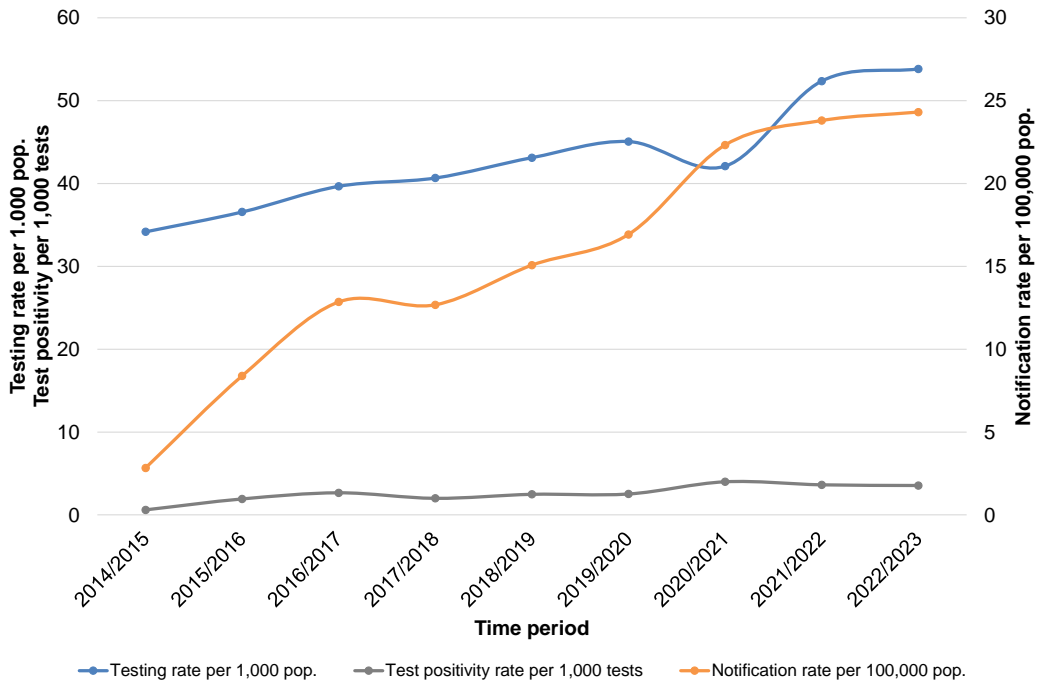


Notes: Data for the 12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March

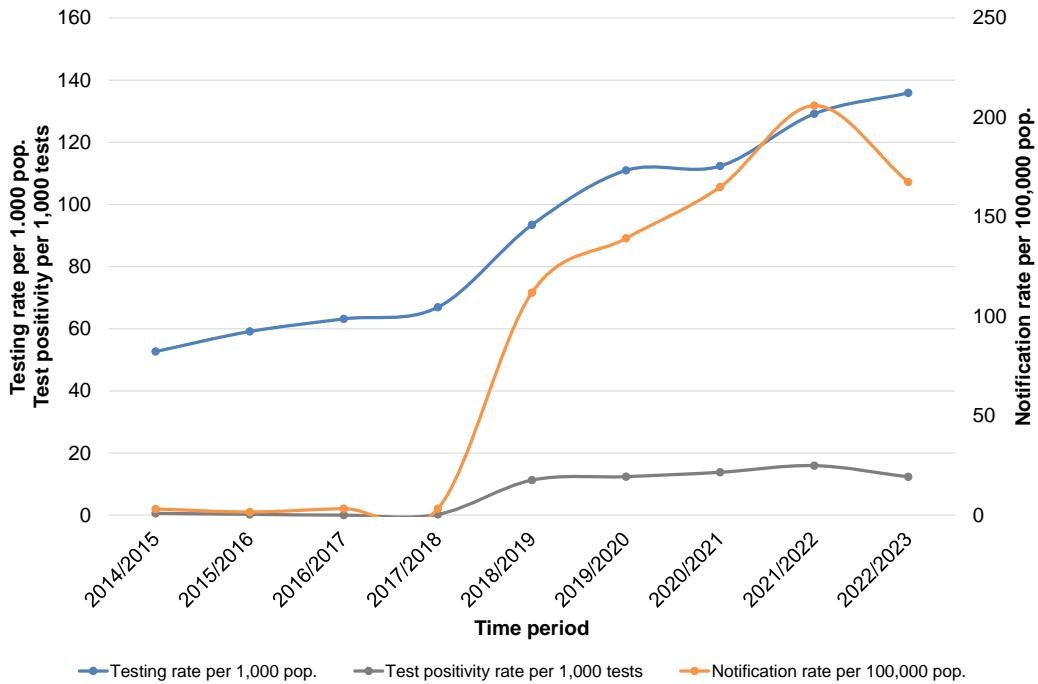


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Graph 6: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Perth metropolitan by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



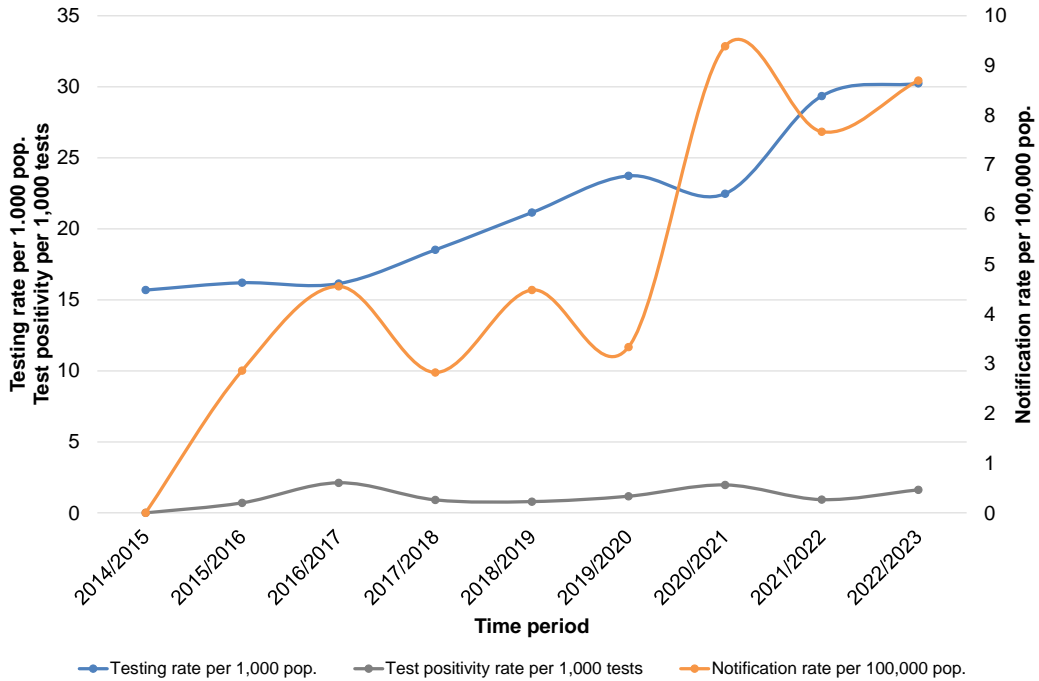
Graph 7: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Pilbara by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



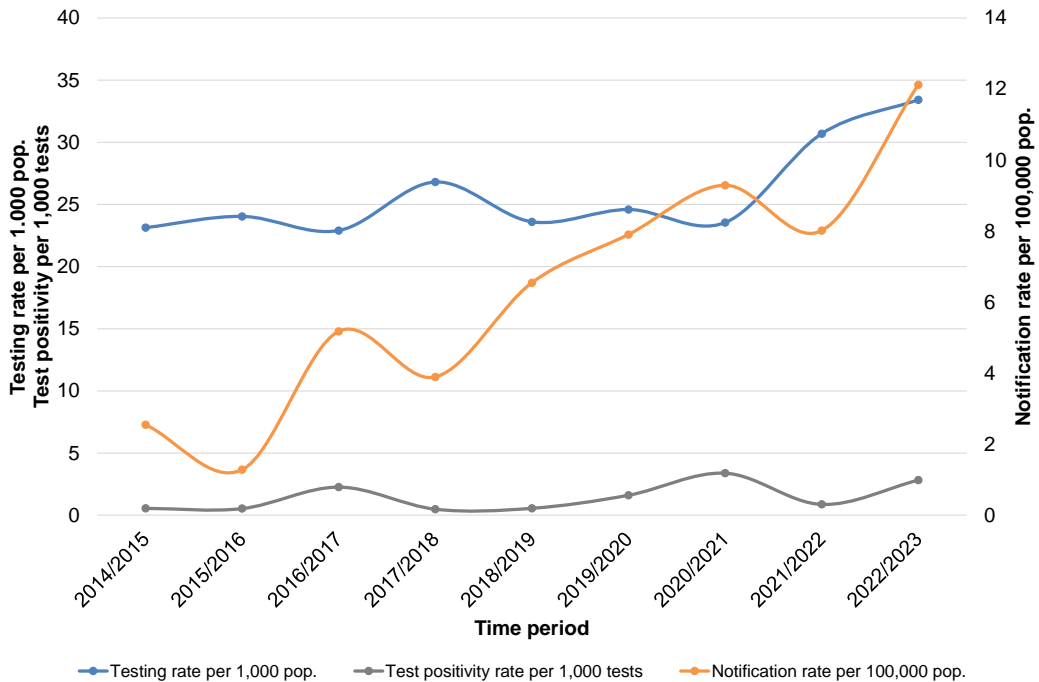


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Graph 8: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in South West by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)



Graph 9: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Wheatbelt by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 April to 31 March)





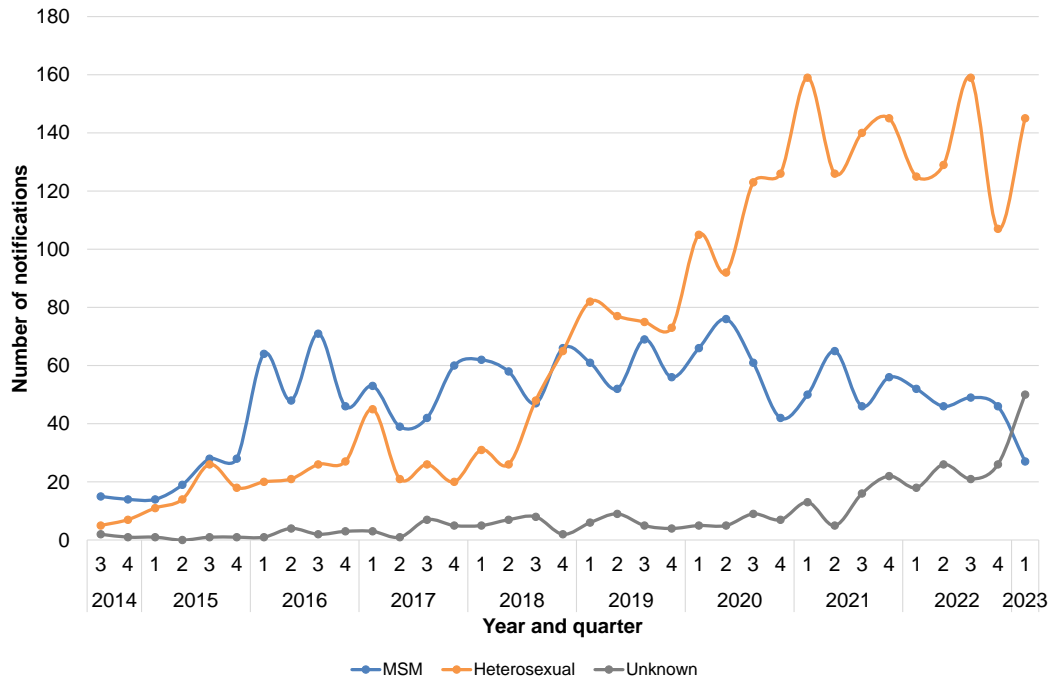
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Table 2. Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases in current reporting quarter

	This quarter	Year to date	This quarter last year
Characteristics			
Total number of cases	222	222	197
% Male / % Female	59% / 41%	59% / 41%	64% / 35%
Number of Aboriginal cases	99	99	72
Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)			
15-19 yrs	16 (7%)	16 (7%)	19 (10%)
20-24 yrs	37 (17%)	37 (17%)	37 (19%)
25-29 yrs	38 (17%)	38 (17%)	29 (15%)
30-34 yrs	42 (19%)	42 (19%)	29 (15%)
35-39 yrs	37 (17%)	37 (17%)	29 (15%)
40-44 yrs	19 (9%)	19 (9%)	22 (11%)
45+ yrs	33 (15%)	33 (15%)	31 (16%)
Notifications in women of childbearing age	84	84	62
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	0	0	2
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	0	2

*Not all age groups included

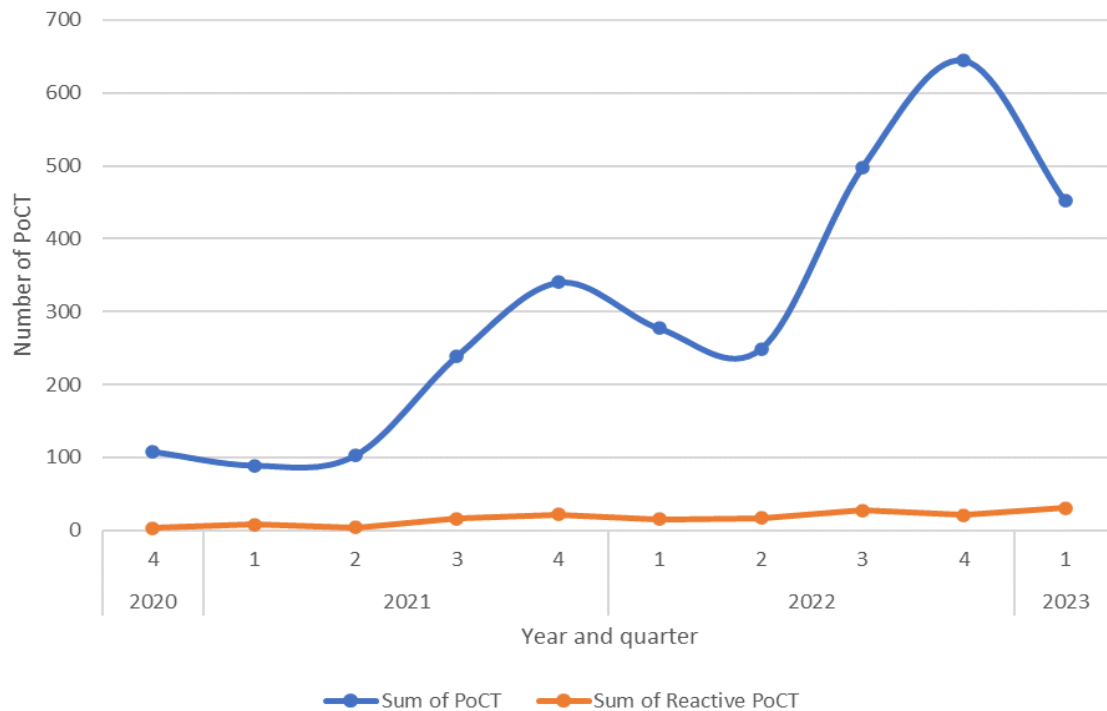
Graph 10: Number of infectious syphilis notifications in WA exposure category and time period





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Graph 11: Number of syphilis point of care tests (PoCT) and number of reactive tests to date by quarter



WA SORG Governance Update

- The WA SORG continue to meet on a quarterly basis, last meeting held on 26 June 2023.
- Clare Huppertz will be acting co-chair for WA SORG for the remainder of 2023.
- Updated WA SORG Terms of Reference to reflect changes in the syphilis outbreak and WA SORG.
- Syphilis Outbreak Response Teams activated in all regions in WA to monitor the outbreak locally and action appropriate initiatives to address the syphilis outbreak.



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Priority Areas Update

Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New HealthySexual campaign with a syphilis focus in market from March – May 2023.• To coincide with the above campaign, new consumer posters regarding syphilis testing and antenatal care, are available to order from Quickmail.• All regions engaging in local sexual health education and health promotion activities for their priority populations.
Priority Area 2: Workforce development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homeless Healthcare hosted a training for professionals who work in homeless sector in metropolitan Perth who have an interest in sexual health. Strong focus on the training was syphilis.• Syphilis Videoconference on the Baby Basket Project in the Pilbara. Available to view on Youtube.• ‘Quick guide for testing and treatment of syphilis infection in WA’ and ‘Quick guide for opportunistic STI testing for people with no symptoms’ resources were updated, available to order on Quickmail, or download from the WA SORG website or Silver book.
Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In Q1 2023, 452 PoCT tests were used for client testing and of those 31 were reactive. Since the beginning of the WA Syphilis PoCT to 31 March 2023, there have been 3293 tests used for client testing, of those 293 were reactive.• Work continues to activate WEBpas public health alerts which will be used for untreated and high-risk syphilis cases.• Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control completed a surge syphilis testing program for at-risk populations in metropolitan Perth.
Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan 2023-2025 published and available on the WA SORG website.• REDCap syphilis management system now operational in almost all regions in WA.• Evaluation and review of the current syphilis funding and activities being conducted.
Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One public health review of a near-miss congenital syphilis case conducted since the last communique.• STORK data collection of antenatal syphilis testing updated. Audits of Q1 2023 data show greater completion of the antenatal syphilis testing data.• Mandatory collection of syphilis antenatal screening will begin July 2023 for all maternity service in WA.• Great Southern Public Health Unit created maternity resource around syphilis and pregnancy for local use.• Baby Basket program continues roll out in the Pilbara and Goldfields region.

Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group
June 2023

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