



# Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group Communique Report – Quarter 3 2023

<b>Distribution</b>	Internal WA Department of Health and stakeholders
<b>Target audience</b>	Health workers in WA
<b>Communique no.</b>	19
<b>Reporting Data</b>	As of 30 September 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.



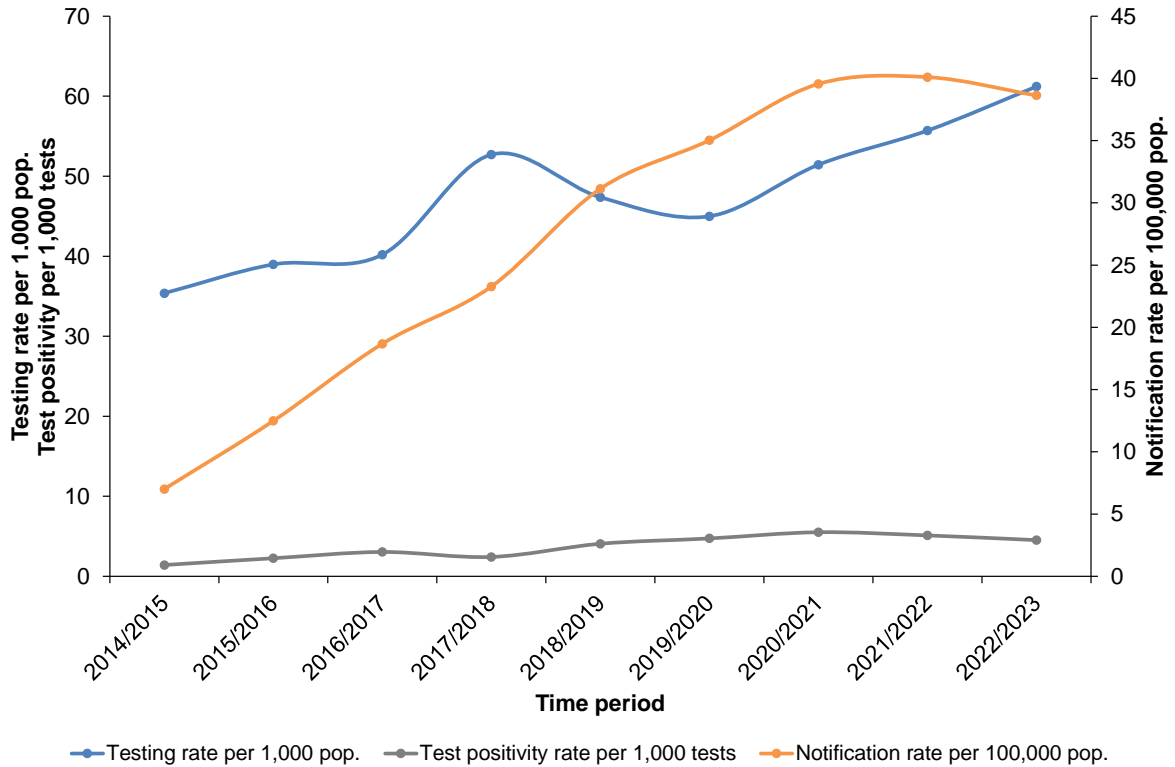
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## Current status

**Table 1. Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases notified in Western Australia, from 1 June 2014 to 30 September 2023.**

Situation to date, 30/09/2023	To date since June 2014
Total number of cases	4,836
% Male / % Female	69% / 30%
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	13 (4)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	6

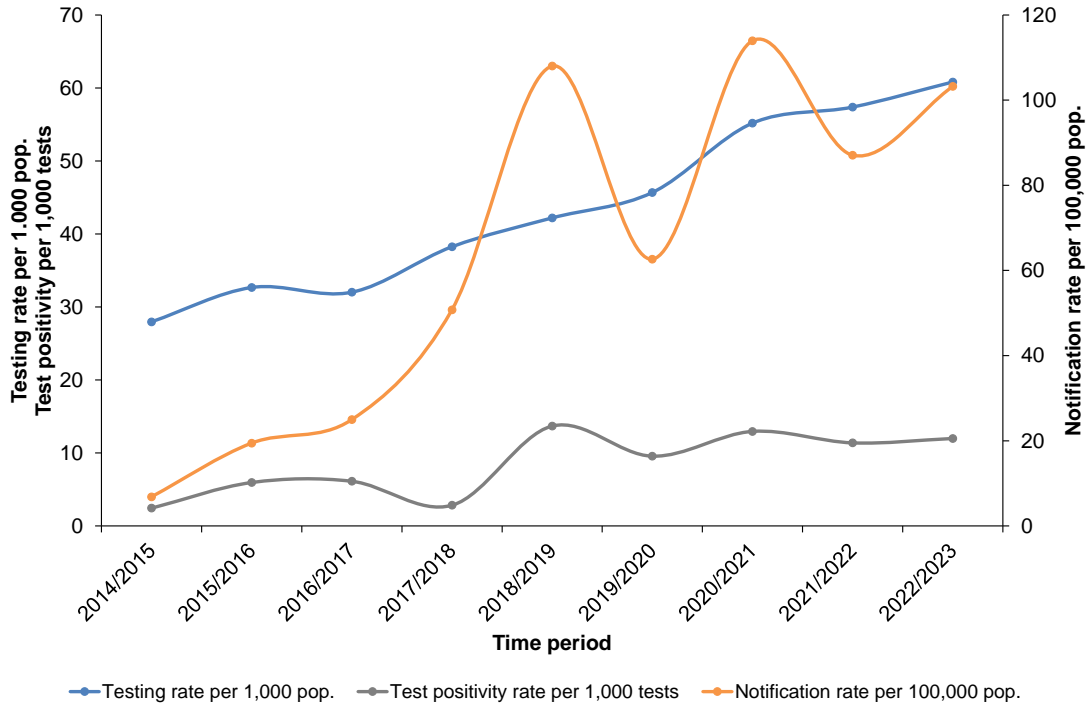
**Graph 1: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in WA by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



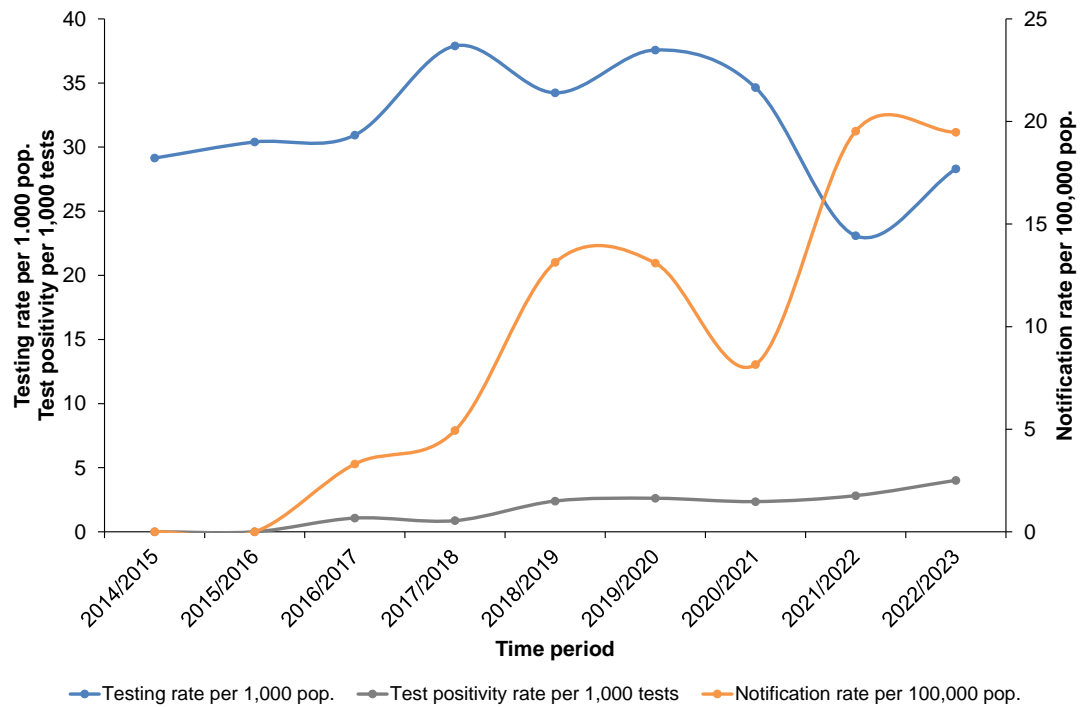


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**Graph 2: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Goldfields by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



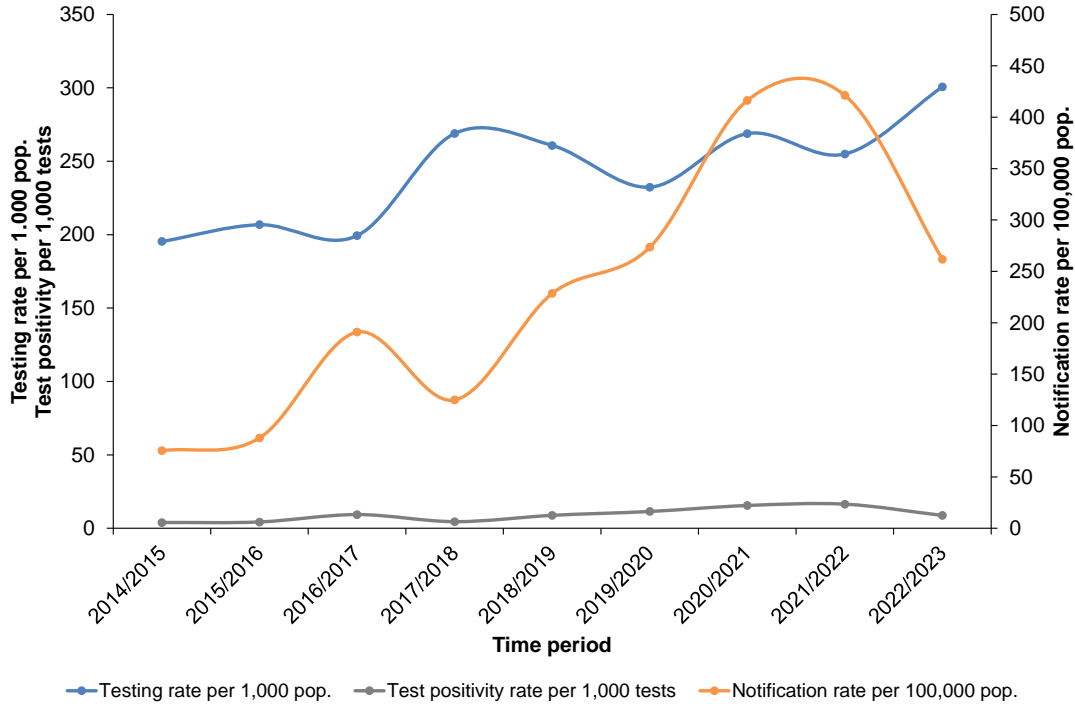
**Graph 3: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Great Southern by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



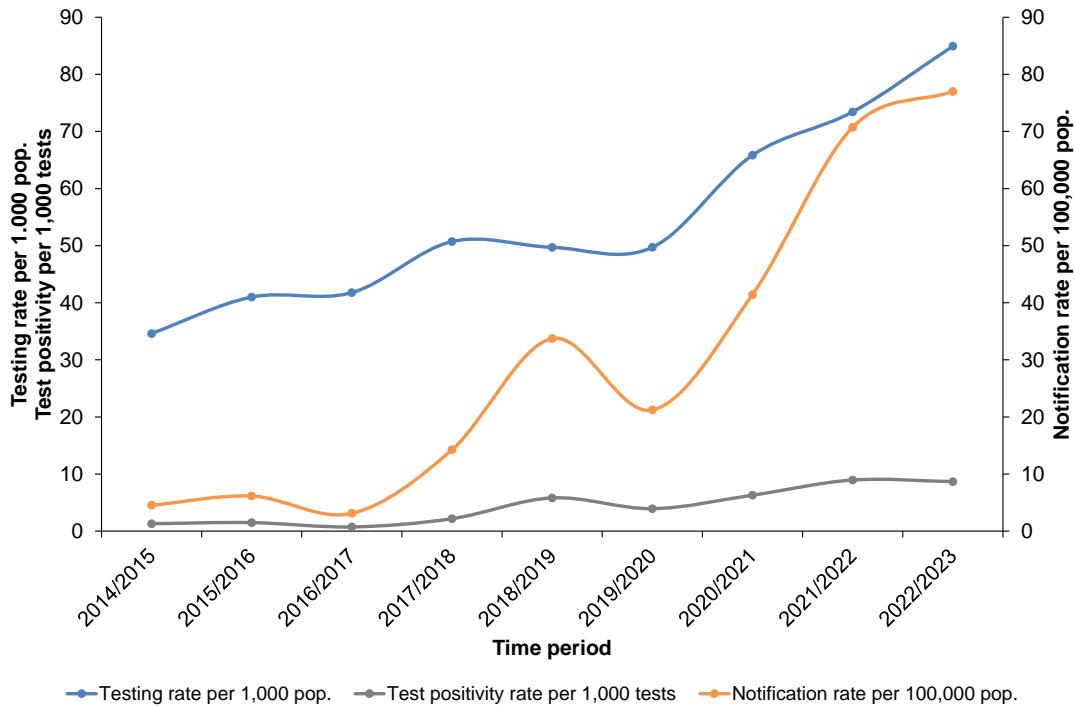


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**Graph 4: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Kimberley by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



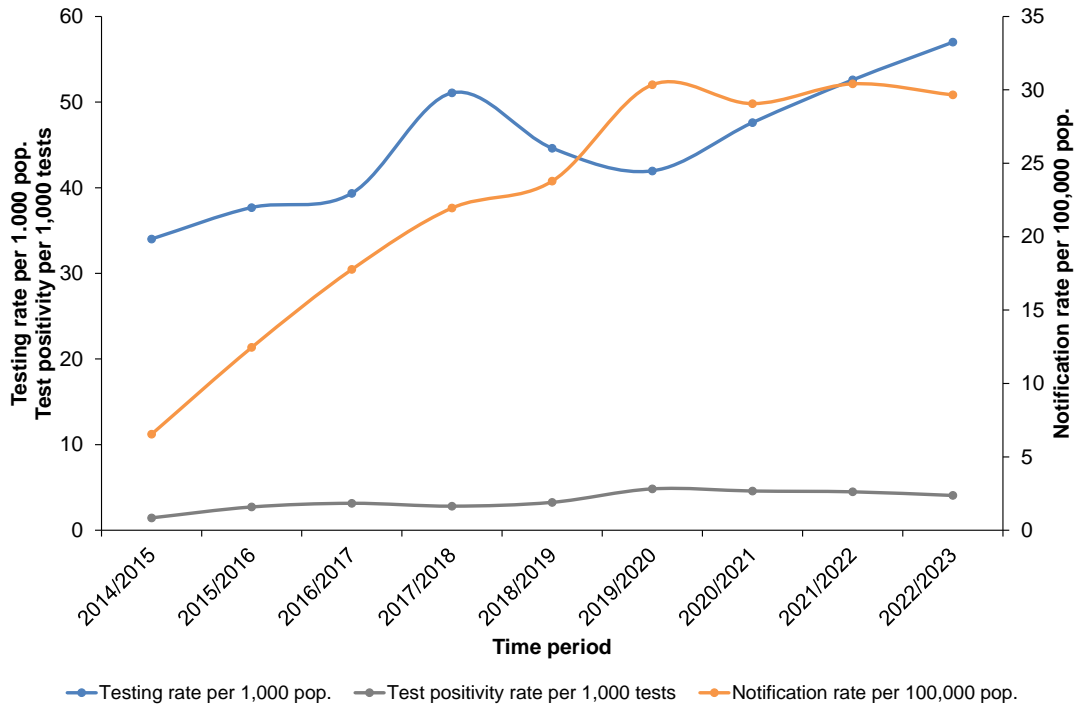
**Graph 5: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Midwest by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



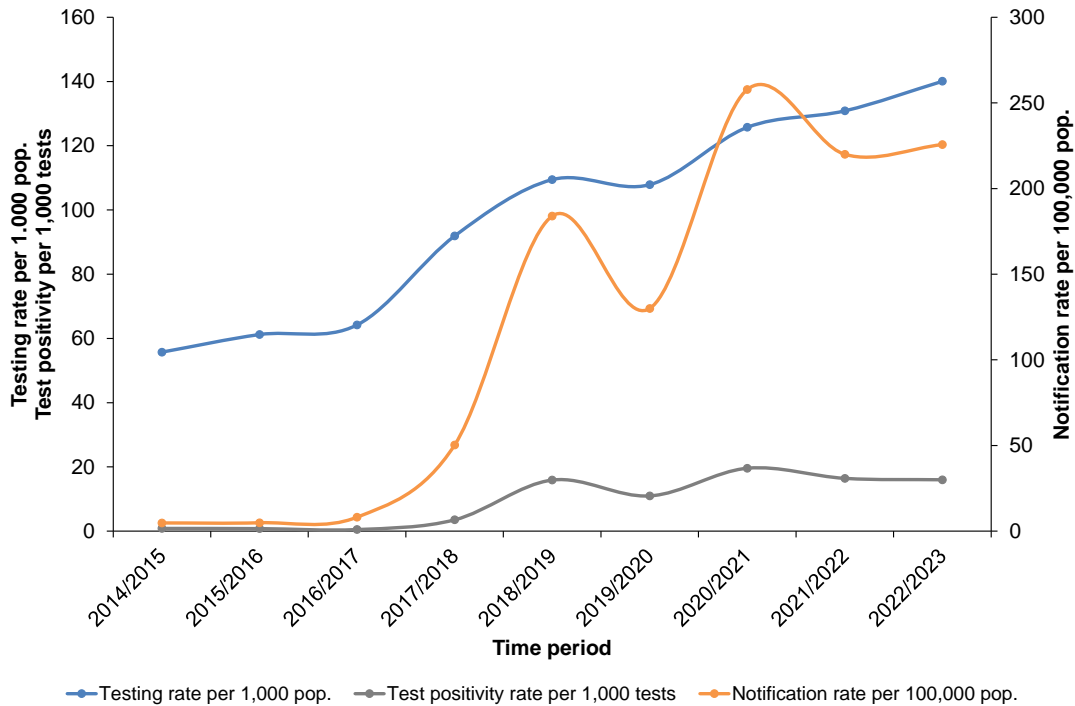


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**Graph 6: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Perth metropolitan by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



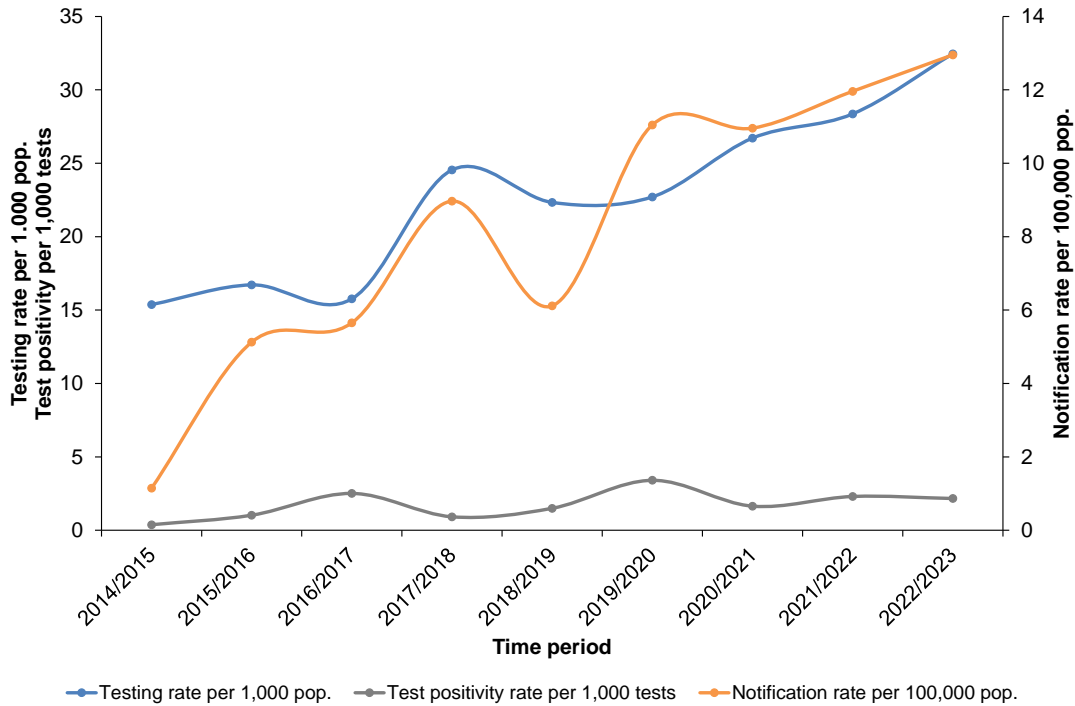
**Graph 7: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Pilbara by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



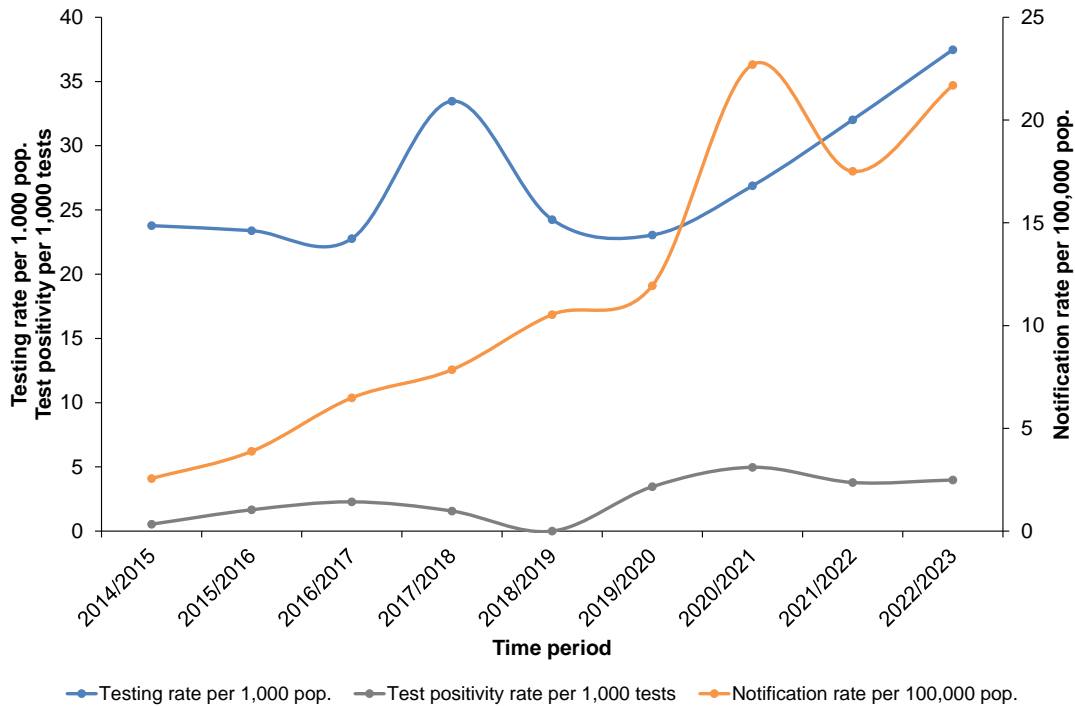


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**Graph 8: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in South West by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**



**Graph 9: Syphilis testing rate, notification rate and test positivity rate in Wheatbelt by time period (12-month reporting period from 01 October to 30 September)**





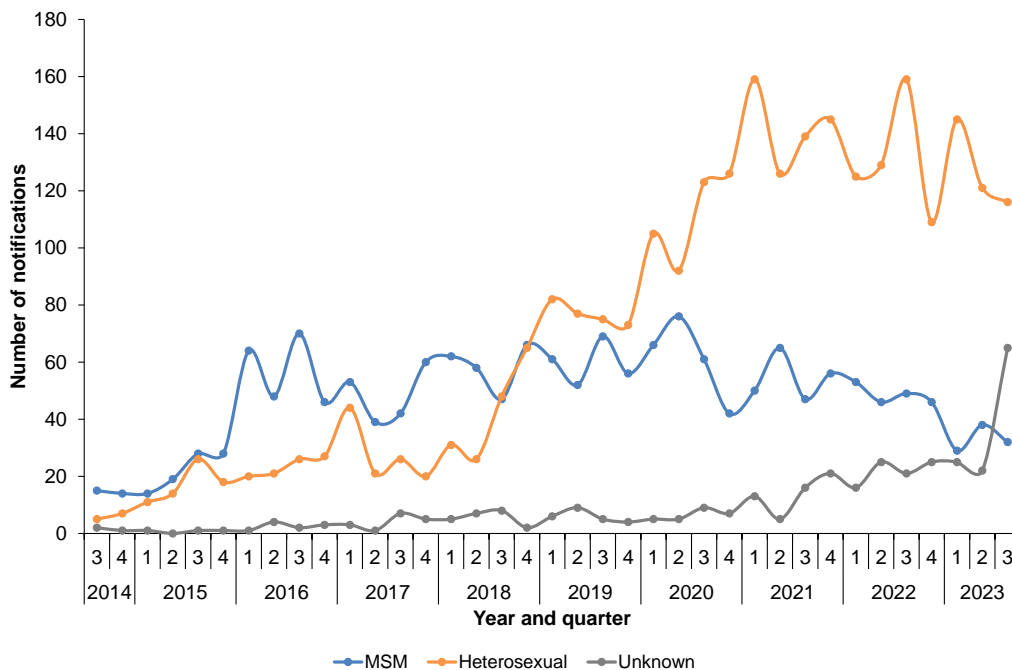
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**Table 2. Characteristics of infectious syphilis cases in current reporting quarter**

	This quarter	Year to date	This quarter last year
<b>Characteristics</b>			
Total number of cases	213	594	229
% Male / % Female	59% / 41%	59% / 41%	62% / 38%
Number of Aboriginal cases	94	265	107
<b>Number of cases reported by specified age group (%)</b>			
15-19 yrs	10 (5%)	44 (7%)	17 (7%)
20-24 yrs	27 (13%)	92 (15%)	37 (16%)
25-29 yrs	48 (23%)	117 (20%)	41 (18%)
30-34 yrs	40 (19%)	107 (18%)	41 (18%)
35-39 yrs	34 (16%)	96 (16%)	38 (17%)
40-44 yrs	24 (11%)	54 (9%)	14 (6%)
45+ yrs	30 (14%)	84 (14%)	40 (17%)
Notifications in women of childbearing age	81	227	81
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	2 (1)	2 (1)	0 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	1	1	0

\*Not all age groups included

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





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## WA SORG Governance Update

- The WA SORG continue to meet on a quarterly basis, last meeting held on 28 November 2023.
- Clare Huppertz last meeting as Acting co-Chair, Paul Armstrong to return in 2024 as co-Chair.

### Priority Area 1: Prevention, education and community engagement

- New HealthySexual campaign with a focus on infectious and congenital syphilis targeting priority populations planned for 2024.

### Priority Area 2: Workforce development

- Sexual Health and Bloodborne Virus Program hosted the Regional Teams Sexual Health Workshop in partnership with Aboriginal Health Council of WA in November 2023. Over 60 professionals across the state attended the workshop.
- Communicable Disease Control Directorate hosted a symposium of syphilis point-of-care testing and a session on congenital syphilis at the Rural Health West Aboriginal Health Conference in November 2023.
- Sexual Health and Bloodborne Virus Program presented on the syphilis PoCT qualitative evaluation at the Public Health Update in November 2023.

### Priority Area 3: Testing, treatment and contact tracing

- Public health units are investigating use of social media as a tool for contact tracing syphilis contacts.
- Work continues to activate WEBpas alerts for untreated and high-risk syphilis cases.

### Priority Area 4: Surveillance and reporting

- Improvements to the syphilis REDCap management system are being implemented.
- Antenatal syphilis testing data collected through the Midwives Notification System is now live on the Maternity Dashboard for monitoring and continuous quality improvement initiatives.

### Priority Area 5: Antenatal and postnatal care

- SiREN have published the report *Improving Aboriginal women's engagement in antenatal care to prevent congenital syphilis*, available to read [here](#).
- Two congenital syphilis public health reviews have been conducted since the last communique. Two more reviews planned in December 2023 for a confirmed case and a near-miss.

#### Prepared by:

WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group  
Dec 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](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/WA-Syphilis-outbreak-response)