

MULTIJURISDICTIONAL SYPHILIS OUTBREAK WORKING GROUP (MJSO)

Meeting Communique, 24 March 2016

This communique has been authorised by the chair of the MJSO, Dr Nathan Ryder.

The Multijurisdictional Syphilis Outbreak Working Group (MJSO) was formed by the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia (CDNA) in April 2015, in response to an ongoing outbreak of syphilis among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living largely in remote and rural areas of northern Australia. Increased notifications associated with the outbreak in northern Australia were first reported in January 2011 in northwest Queensland, followed by the Northern Territory (NT) in July 2013, and the Kimberley region of Western Australia (WA) in June 2014. This communique summarises the outbreak epidemiological data as of 29 February 2016 (current status), and the activities of the MJSO from 01 October 2015 - 29 February 2016.

Current status

Outbreak data to 29 February 2016 are summarised in Figure 1 and Table 1 below.

Figure 1. Epidemic curve showing outbreak cases of infectious syphilis^α notified in affected regions^β of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, from commencement of the outbreak in each jurisdiction to 29 February 2016^γ.

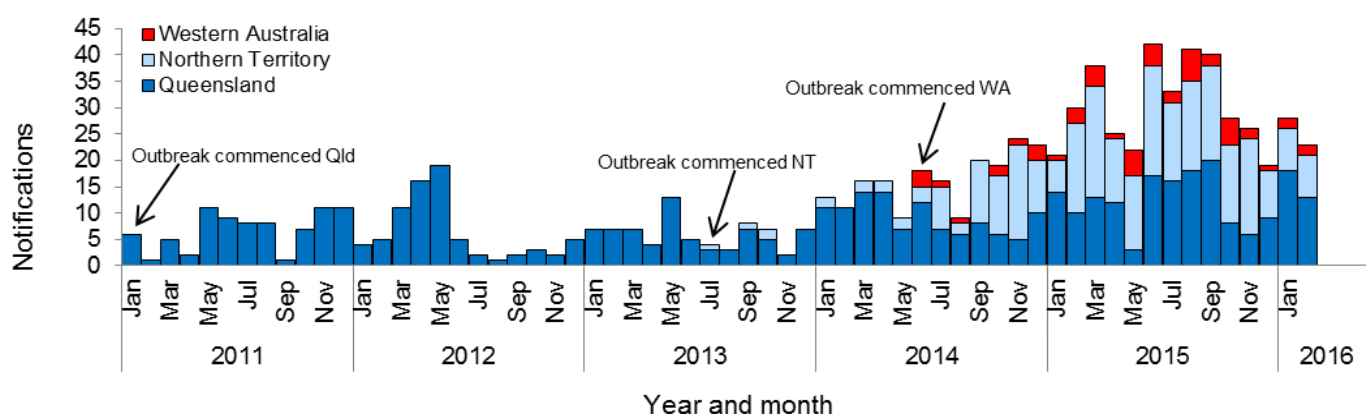


Table 1. Characteristics of outbreak cases of infectious syphilis notified in affected regions of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, to 29 February 2016^γ.

	North Qld (four HHSs ^β)	NT (four regions ^β)	WA (Kimberley region)
Situation to-date, 29 February 2016			
Outbreak commencement month/yr	January 2011	July 2013	June 2014
Total number of cases ^α	510	277	51
Percent cases reported in 15-29 year age group	72%	79%	80%
% Male / % Female	44% / 56%	50% / 50%	31% / 69%
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	3 (1)	1 (2)	0 (0)
-number of deaths in congenital cases	3	0	0
Last reporting month, 1-29 Feb 2016			
Number of cases ^α	13	8	2
Percent cases reported in 15-29 year age group	54%	50%	50%
% Male / % Female	54% / 46%	50% / 50%	100% / 0%

^α Cases defined as per the MJSO syphilis outbreak case definition:

Nationally, an infectious syphilis outbreak case is defined as: any person who is newly diagnosed with confirmed or probable infectious syphilis according to the CDNA national surveillance case definition for infectious syphilis, **AND**, is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who resides in any of the following outbreak declared regions as defined and documented by that jurisdiction, at or after the dates indicated: **Qld** - Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service area (from 1 December 2012); Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service area (from 1 August 2013); North West Hospital and Health Service area (from 1 January 2011); Townsville Hospital and Health Service area (from 1 January 2014); **NT** - Alice Springs or Barkly district (from 1 July 2013); Katherine district (from 1 May 2014); East Arnhem district (from 1 November 2015); **WA** - Kimberley region, Western Australia (from 1 June 2014), **OR**, is a sexual contact of a confirmed outbreak case.

^β Affected regions include Torres and Cape, Cairns and Hinterland, North West, and Townsville Hospital and Health Services in Queensland; Alice Springs, Barkly, East Arnhem and Katherine regions in the Northern Territory, and: the Kimberley health region in Western Australia.

^γ Please note that all data are provisional and subject to change due to ongoing case investigation.

Activities of the MJSO, 01 October 2015 - 29 February 2016:

- updated CDNA of the current outbreak situation and MJSO activities. CDNA supported the proposal for a multijurisdictional campaign to increase community awareness of the outbreak and the need for testing (see community engagement below)
- ensured that correct information regarding the outbreak was in the public domain by submitting a paper describing the outbreak epidemiology to the journal *Communicable Diseases Intelligence* (CDI)
- identified the need for information sharing about health promotion initiatives and set up a platform to facilitate this
- created a 'Data working group' to address epidemiological questions pertinent to the outbreak, including: what data are needed to monitor the epidemiology of the outbreak and control efforts at the local, regional and multijurisdictional levels; and how to interpret data on testing coverage and positivity to guide outbreak responses.

Community engagement

A sub-group, Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (EAC) meets monthly, and reports back to the MJSO with suggestions for improved community engagement. During this period, the EAC:

- developed a checklist for jurisdictions to use when engaging with communities
- recommended the need for infectious syphilis and antenatal testing rates to be provided to staff at the local service provider level
- submitted a proposal to the Commonwealth for funding of a multijurisdictional campaign to increase community awareness of the outbreak and the need for testing.

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