

Fact Sheet – for health professionals

# SA Syphilis Register

Telephone: 1300 232 272

## Background

A multi-jurisdictional syphilis outbreak in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was first identified in January 2011, in northwest Queensland, followed by the Northern Territory in July 2013, and the Kimberley region of Western Australia in June 2014. SA Health declared an outbreak in March 2017, which extended to Adelaide in November 2018.

Separately, there is also a national syphilis outbreak amongst men who have sex with men.

A national outbreak response team, led by the Commonwealth Government, has developed a range of responses to the outbreak in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The South Australian Syphilis Outbreak Working Group was formed in May 2017, with representation from government, non-government, research, and the Aboriginal health sectors and has developed a [comprehensive response strategy](#) encompassing a number of action areas.

The SA Syphilis Register (the Register) is one important element of the response and is modelled on successful Registers in other jurisdictions operating for many years, prior to the national outbreak.

## The SA Syphilis Register

The SA Syphilis Register (the Register) is a secure, confidential, single statewide database which includes all laboratory-positive syphilis cases diagnosed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians which meet the [syphilis national case definition](#). The initial information is obtained from the Department for Health and Wellbeing's (the Department) Communicable Disease Control Branch (CDCB) notification system, which collects data under provisions within the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* (the Act). Syphilis data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cases is then securely transferred to the Register.

The Register aims to improve the management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by syphilis by:

- > providing the treating clinician with information about a client's history of syphilis infection to assist in diagnosis, staging, management, education and treatment
- > supporting enhanced surveillance, screening, treatment of cases, and tracing of contacts
- > actively assisting clinicians in the partner notification (contact tracing) process, to identify and treat contacts where appropriate
- > improving the accuracy of reporting and monitoring trends in notifications.

The Register includes an individual's pathology results for all tests related to the diagnosis and monitoring of syphilis and any associated treatment.

Register staff will request information from clinicians to confirm treatment information and keep accurate records.

At this stage, the Register is not tracking cases in non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

## Partner notification

When required, the Register staff may undertake or assist with partner notification (also known as contact tracing), for all contacts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cases, regardless of Aboriginality. The Register staff contact partners (or coordinate the contacting of partners) with the aim of coordinating syphilis screening and treatment, where appropriate.

Partner notification for non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cases will not be undertaken by Register staff but will continue to be supported by Adelaide Sexual Health Centre.

## Confidentiality and consent

Under the Act, medical practitioners and pathology services must inform the Department of cases suspected of having, or diagnosed with, any notifiable condition, including syphilis.

The Act absolves the reporting medical practitioner and pathology service from any legal liability concerning consent to release the required information. However, it is wise to inform the patient (or their care giver) that a report must be provided and that the Department (in this case the Register staff) may be in contact with the patient in relation to partner notification. Disease notification and partner notification are confidential processes. The Act requires the Department to protect the confidentiality of this information and prevents release of identified data to any person not involved in data collection, investigation, public health action or treatment and care of that person.

## Who has access to information on the Register?

Access is strictly limited to staff within CDCB, including SA Syphilis Register staff, specialist doctors and staff within the Disease Surveillance and Investigation Section, who receive initial notifications and transfer data to the Register.

Health providers external to CDCB who are involved in direct care of patients may then contact the Register staff to seek information from the Register; however, these health providers will not have direct viewing access to the Register.

Health providers, who are involved in the direct care of patients on the Register, include:

- > Primary health care staff and Aboriginal health workers
- > General practitioners
- > Paediatricians, physicians, obstetricians and other medical specialists.
- > If a patient moves or travels between jurisdictions, their information may be shared between states for continuity of care.

## For more information

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