

20 August 2019

## Syphilis Outbreak

- The number of cases of infectious syphilis is starting to stabilise in Auckland. There is still a considerable level of circulating infection in the region.
- There are [posters for waiting rooms](#) and a new website: [healthysex.nz](http://healthysex.nz)
- Prescribe condoms for reproductive or sexual consults and advertise free condoms in your waiting room.
- Test for syphilis – advise 3 monthly checks for men who have sex with men (MSM) on PrEP or having high risk sex.
- Discuss any person with positive syphilis serology with the Auckland Regional Sexual Health Service (ARSHS) – phone the ARSHS Registrar on 021 883 703 or nurse triage line 0800 739 432.
- Discuss partner notification and contact tracing with patients
- Notify ESR of all infectious syphilis cases. Please let your syphilis patients know that this will occur as syphilis is a notifiable infection.

## Who should be tested for syphilis?

- Anyone presenting with possible symptoms or signs of infectious syphilis. **STI checks are not complete without syphilis.**
- Anyone from the MSM (men who have sex with men) community:
  1. Remember to test 3 sites (throat, anus, penis)
  2. If on PrEP - make sure they are having **3 monthly** comprehensive STI checks
  3. If MSM is having high-risk sex i.e. bare backing (without condoms) or chem sex (taking drugs for sex in groups) - recommend **3 monthly** checks as well
  4. Offer testing to all sexually active MSM at least **annually**
- **Pregnant women should be re-tested at 28-32 weeks if at risk of STI e.g. partner change or diagnosed with another STI**
- Recommend patients who are sexually active to have annual STI checks
- **Discuss with ARSHS** any sexual contacts of anyone diagnosed with syphilis – sexual contacts may still be infected despite initial negative syphilis serology.

**Important note: 50% of syphilis cases are asymptomatic and will only be diagnosed through serological testing.**

## Resources to promote condom use and testing

- Promote availability of condoms on prescription or at least offer them to patients who come in for any sexual or reproductive related consult. Note there are new varieties of condoms available on prescription (new sizes and flavours)
- There is a new website aimed at MSM and heterosexuals, <http://healthysex.nz>, with testing sites listed and a section on how to inform your partner. Additional resource materials will be made available for the outbreak on this website.
- Posters are available for waiting rooms [here](#).
- A podcast on syphilis is available on the [Goodfellow Unit website](#) aimed at increasing General Practitioners' understanding of syphilis.

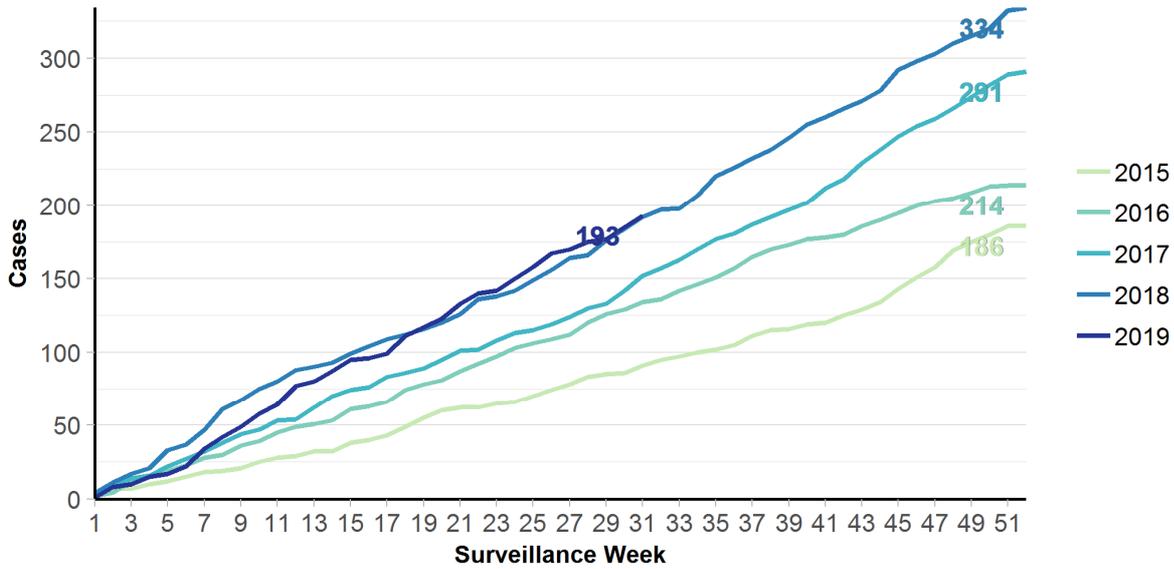
## Syphilis management

- Discuss any person with positive syphilis serology with the Auckland Regional Sexual Health Service (ARSHS). Phone the ARSHS Registrar on 021 883 703 or nurse triage line 0800 739 432.
- Discuss partner notification and contact tracing with your patient
- For further information on the ARSHS contact tracing service, please review the most recent Scope newsletter- [https://www.labtests.co.nz/images/News/The\\_Scope/190802\\_The\\_Scope\\_Aug\\_2019.pdf](https://www.labtests.co.nz/images/News/The_Scope/190802_The_Scope_Aug_2019.pdf)
- Syphilis is a notifiable disease and notification to ESR is a legal requirement. Please let your syphilis patients know that this will occur as syphilis is a notifiable infection.
- More information on management is available on [Regional Healthpathways](#).

## Update on current syphilis outbreak

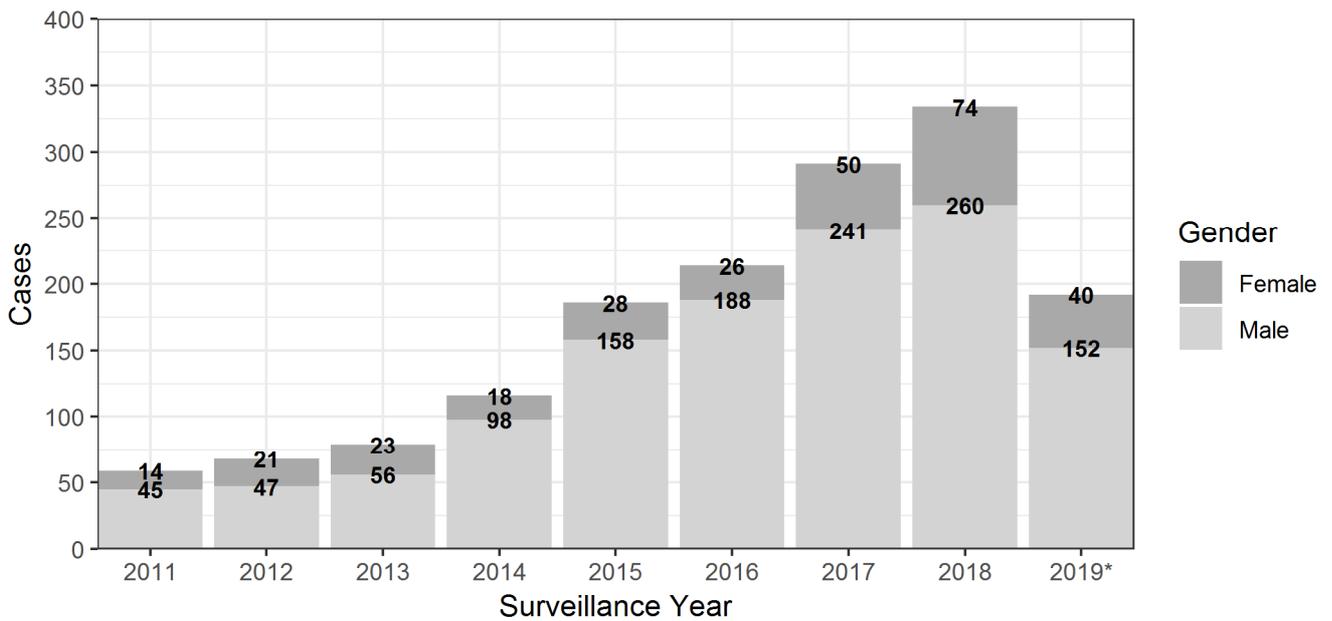
Syphilis is a serious bacterial infection transmitted by intimate sexual contact including oral, vaginal or anal sex. It may be transmitted during pregnancy to the unborn child via the placenta or at delivery. If untreated during pregnancy, syphilis has a high chance of causing miscarriage, stillbirth and congenital abnormalities. Treatment is most effective at preventing complications if given in early pregnancy.

The number of infectious syphilis cases diagnosed by the Auckland Regional Sexual Health Service (ARSHS) has been increasing steadily since 2013. Since the end of 2018, additional resources have been directed towards managing this outbreak, resulting in the stabilisation of newly identified cases. However there are still considerable levels of infection circulating in the community and concerted effort is required to control any increases in cases.



**Incidence of new syphilis diagnosis (probable and confirmed) in the Auckland region per week**

While MSM still make up the greater proportion of cases, heterosexual men and women make up over a third of new diagnoses in the Auckland region based on ARSHS data. This change of proportions may be related to the increased efforts by ARSHS to identify and contact trace women of child bearing age to reduce the likelihood of congenital syphilis cases. Ethnic minorities are disproportionately impacted by syphilis with higher rates seen in Māori, Pasifika, Asians and Latin Americans, especially those from more deprived backgrounds.



\* year in progress, case counts labelled

**Syphilis counts by gender (2011-2019)**