

Syphilis IMT Communique

August Report 2025

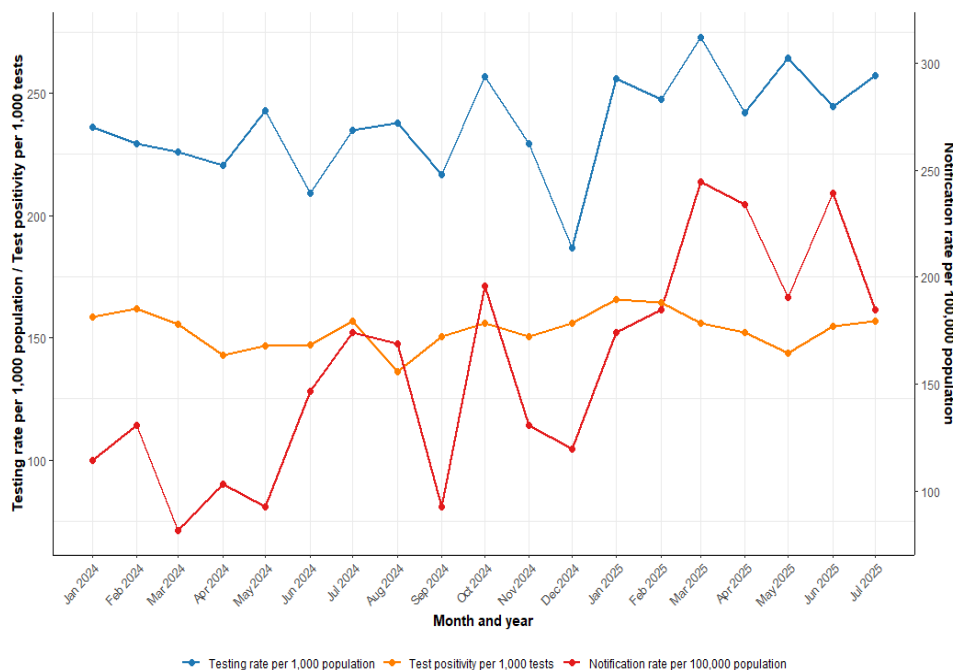
Background

- An infectious syphilis outbreak has been ongoing in the Northern Territory (NT) since 2013, with 2,596 cases notified to date. Over the past 12 months cases of notified syphilis have steadily increased.
- In response to this changing epidemiology, the previous Chief Health Officer established the syphilis Incident Management Team (IMT) on 28 February 2025
- The NT has the highest number of notified cases for its population in Australia, with the outbreak seeing the re-emergence of historically rare but severe complications, including congenital syphilis, where the infection is passed from mother to child during pregnancy or childbirth.
- Syphilis was declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance (CDINS) by the Chief Medical Officer of Australia, Professor Michael Kidd AO, 7th August 2025 in response to growing case numbers across Australia.

Declaring a [CDINS](#) will bring together national efforts to coordinate an enhanced national response in line with key actions in the [National Syphilis Response Plan](#).

Testing and notification trend

Figure 1: Syphilis treponemal specific testing rate, test positivity and infectious syphilis notification rate by month, Northern Territory, 1 January 2024 – 31 July 2025



	This year March to July 2025	Last year March to July 2024	% Change
Testing rate / 1,000 population	270.8	241.8	+12.0% ▲
Test positivity / 1,000 tests	145.0	141.1	+2.8% ▲
Notification rate / 100,000 population	191.1	104.6	+82.7% ▲

Since the establishment of the syphilis IMT on 28 February 2025, syphilis testing has increased by 12%, syphilis test positivity by 2.8%, and infectious syphilis notifications by 82.7% compared to the same period in 2024. The observed increases likely reflect improved testing and contact tracing efforts, leading to increased diagnosis of previously undetected cases in communities and healthcare settings. These are encouraging trends, however more testing is needed to get on top of the outbreak.

Table 1: Characteristics of infectious syphilis and congenital syphilis cases notified in the Northern Territory since start of syphilis outbreak, 1 July 2013 – 20 August 2025

Summary of situation to date

	1 July 2013 – 20 August 2025
Total number of infectious syphilis cases	2,996
Total number of outbreak cases (as per national infectious syphilis outbreak case definition)	2,602
% Male / % Female (of all infectious syphilis cases)	52% / 48%
Congenital syphilis cases, confirmed (probable)	6 (5)
Number of deaths in congenital syphilis cases	1

Six Months Review

Pre and during IMT comparison

Notifications 1 March – 20 August 2025

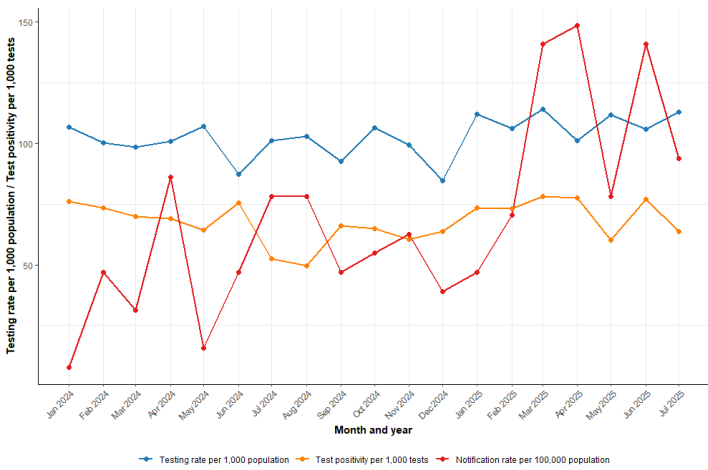
	Notifications 1 March – 20 August	
	Syphilis IMT 2025	Same period last year 2024
Total number of infectious syphilis cases	209	131
% Male / % Female	56% / 44%	53% / 47%
Number and % of Aboriginal cases	190 (91%)	108 (82%)
Number and % of female cases of childbearing age (15-49)	82 (89%)	56 (92%)

Testing 1 March - 31 July 2025

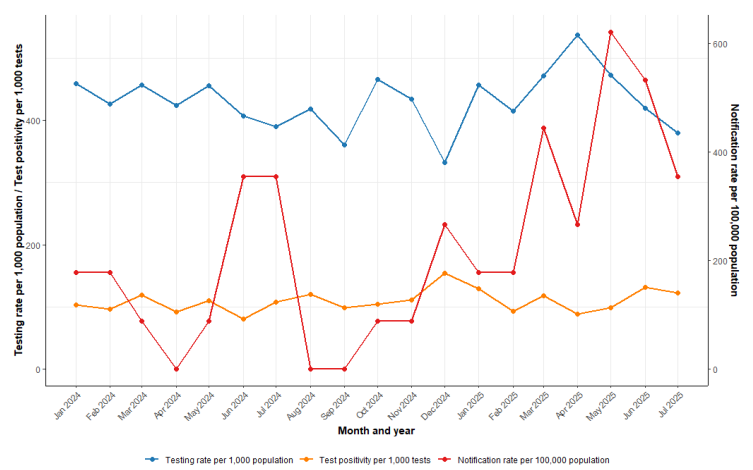
	Testing 1 March – 31 July	
	Syphilis IMT 2025	Same period last year 2024
Total number of treponemal specific tests*	28,233	25,225
Test positivity (%)	14.5%	14.1%
% Male / % Female	41% / 59%	40% / 60%
Number and % of female tested of childbearing age (15-49)	12,697 (77%)	11,700 (78%)

Testing and notification trend by health districts

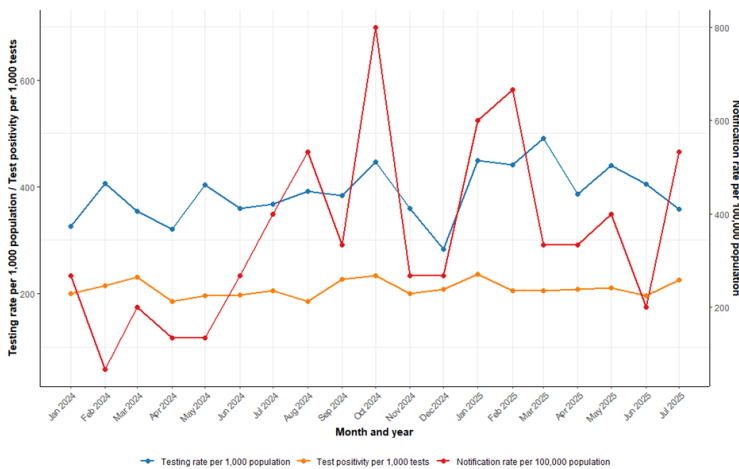
Darwin Urban



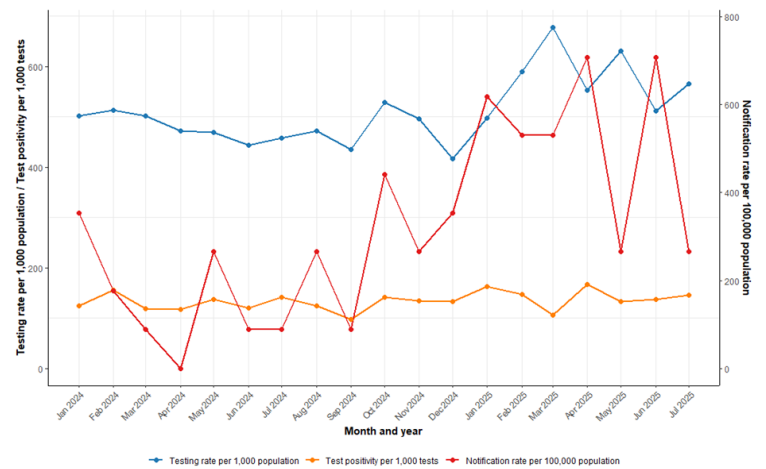
Darwin Rural



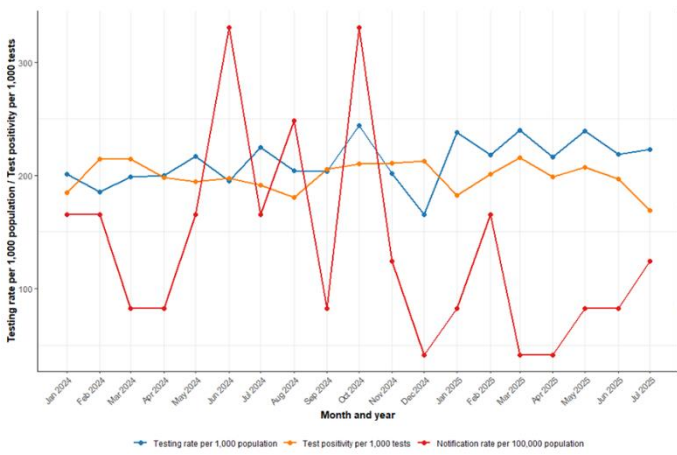
Katherine



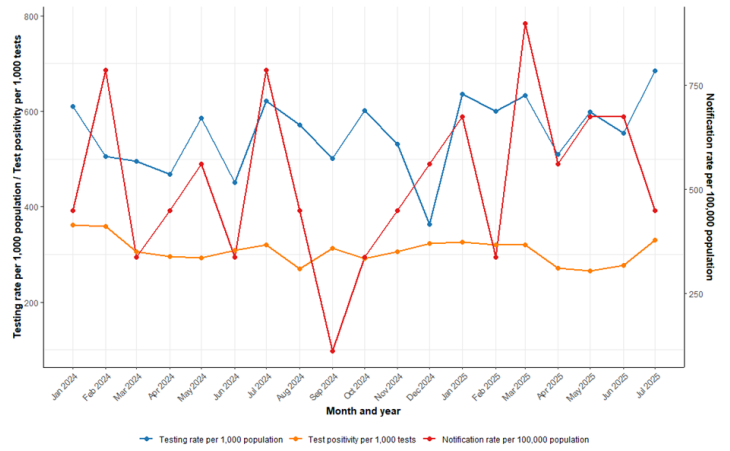
East Arnhem



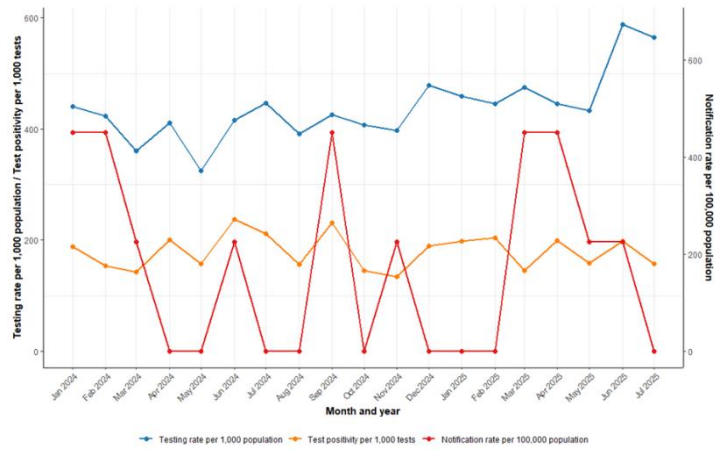
Alice Springs Urban



Alice Springs Rural



Barkly



Incident Action Plan Progress

Priorities	Progress
Established Regional Tactical groups - short term	Bronze IMT Groups: Established and meeting fortnightly
Share information and data between participating regions - short / medium / long	Ongoing: Information sharing via Bronze IMT Groups and Syphilis IMT administration
Plan, set targets, direct and monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) of the NT-Wide and regional coordinated public health response – short and ongoing	Progressing: NT Syphilis Action Plan nearing finalisation
Implement standardised indicators and reporting in affected regions – short / ongoing	In progress: ACCHOs and AMSANT collaborating to standardise dashboards and reporting
Development and implementation of a syphilis action plan – short / medium	In progress: SHAC feedback received; finalisation underway
Develop, deliver and evaluate syphilis-specific education and support of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and communities - short / medium (ongoing)	Training: Developed with Menzies; first pilot held in Alice Springs (August), next in Darwin (October)
Identify, implement and monitor strategies to improve testing, case detection and management of syphilis among antenatal females –short	Maternity audit underway
Strengthen partnerships with government and non-government services to develop and implement strategies	Ongoing: Close collaboration through regional Bronze IMT groups and the Silver IMT group.
Develop a communication plan – short / medium	Ongoing: Media and comms campaign delivered—community radio, posters, social tiles, intranet banner, audio files, consumer webpage, media coverage (ABC TV & radio, NT News, Centralian Today, NT Independent, Mix104.9), META & YouTube ads, commercial radio. Download the posters here: NT Health Resource Link
Health promotion and community engagement – short / medium / long	Ongoing
Investigate opportunities to increase human resources short / medium	Ongoing: Additional IMT positions identified; Wishlist developed for CHO/Commonwealth.

NT Health

Centre for Disease Control

Contacts

- Syphilis IMT: SyphilisIMT.Health@nt.gov.au
- NT Syphilis Register: syphilis_register.ths@nt.gov.au
- [Clinic 34](#): Locations in Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs.

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