

# GP Connect

Keeping GPs informed in the changing primary health landscape



6 August 2020

## Metropolitan Perth syphilis outbreak alert

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Up until two years ago, syphilis in metropolitan Perth occurred primarily among men who have sex with men. However, the number of women acquiring syphilis is increasing and there has been a pronounced increase among vulnerable and high priority groups, including young Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, people who are experiencing homelessness, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people who inject drugs.

Aboriginal people comprised 12 percent of notifications of infectious syphilis in the metro area in 2020, compared to less than one percent in 2015. There have been 26 infectious syphilis notifications in people experiencing homelessness in the past 18 months, compared to six in the previous four years combined. Of individuals experiencing homelessness notified with infectious syphilis since 2017, half are Aboriginal people.

Notifications in women of childbearing age increased nearly six-fold between 2015 and 2019, and there have been eight notifications in pregnant women in the first half of 2020. There have been two cases of congenital syphilis in Perth since 2018, including one stillbirth, both in women from vulnerable groups who contracted syphilis during pregnancy which was not diagnosed until the time of delivery.



What does this mean for GPs and primary health care providers?

- Be aware that infectious syphilis is increasing significantly in metropolitan Perth. Vulnerable populations include Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, homeless people and people who inject drugs. Of particular concern are the women of reproductive age in these groups.
- Take blood for syphilis testing from all patients attending for diagnosis and treatment of any STI, or where screening for STIs is indicated.
- Offer opportunistic screening for STIs, including syphilis, to identified vulnerable populations.
- Take blood for syphilis testing at the booking appointment, 28 weeks, 36 weeks and delivery from all pregnant women from vulnerable and higher risk groups.
- Do a pregnancy test on all women of childbearing age diagnosed with syphilis.
- Provide presumptive treatment with benzathine benzylpenicillin injection 2.4 million units (1.8 gm) IM stat to all patients with clinical signs of infectious syphilis and all sexual contacts of infectious syphilis. Syphilis of longer or unknown duration should be treated once weekly for three weeks.
- Benzathine benzylpenicillin is available as a Doctor's Bag item.

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## Metropolitan Perth syphilis outbreak alert (cont)

- Syphilis serology (including RPR) should be repeated at the time of treatment and then be checked at three, six and 12 months post-treatment.
- All cases should be notified promptly to the Department of Health. MCDC can assist with contact tracing, provision of benzathine benzyl penicillin and advice on management.
- Discussion with a sexual health specialist is recommended for pregnant patients, HIV co-infection, and tertiary syphilis.
- Complete the [Australasian Society Sexual Health, Viral Hepatitis and HIV Medicine's Syphilis Outbreak on-line training](#) approved by RACGP for 4 CPD points, and endorsed by the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) and the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.
- Contact Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control on 9222 8588, Mon-Fri 8am-5pm if you wish to discuss management of a syphilis case or require assistance to obtain benzathine penicillin or with contact tracing.

For further information, refer to:

- [WA Guidelines for Managing Sexually Transmitted Infections](#) (Silver Book)
- [WA Health WA Syphilis outbreak response](#)
- [Symptoms and Defining Stages of Syphilis](#) CDCD webinar

## GP Hospital Liaison Updates

### FSH Virtual Immunology Clinic

In recent months, Fiona Stanley Hospital (FSH) has offered suitable immunology clinic patients the option of a specialist consultation via telephone/video call. In some cases, a follow up call is given during a GP consultation where the results of initial investigation and treatment can be assessed and an ongoing management plan discussed. It is hoped that this will improve patient experience and access as well as provide an educative/upskilling opportunity for the referring GP.

A survey of patients seen in the traditional outpatient and the Virtual Immunology Clinic (VIC) showed that the feedback from the VIC group was overwhelmingly positive. Ease of access, shorter waiting times, the quality of the consultation and less disruption to work and school were consistently expressed in comments.

Only two patients experienced a degree of technical difficulty.

GPs whose patients have been seen in the VIC will soon be sent a short survey to allow feedback and comments about this initiative. This will be attached to a copy of the Outpatient letter containing outcomes and the management plan. It would be very much appreciated if these surveys were completed and returned by fax or email.

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Available: Monday and Thursday

## Clinical updates

### Telehealth stage seven update

To encourage patients to receive continuous care from their regular GP or practice, it is now a legislative requirement that GPs and Other Medical Practitioners working in general practice can only use the COVID-19 MBS items for telehealth or telephone services where they are the patient's 'usual medical practitioner'. View the updated [WA Primary Health Alliance Practice Assist factsheets](#) and FAQs for more information or visit the [COVID-19 Telehealth](#) and [COVID-19 MBS Items](#) HealthPathways.

### STI Contact tracing video for health professionals working in regional and remote WA

The WA Health Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program has worked closely with the Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service to develop a video on contact tracing for health professionals working in regional and remote WA. It features a Registered Nurse and an Aboriginal Liaison Officer based in Kununurra and covers the essential components of contact tracing for sexually transmitted diseases and potential scenarios that clinicians might face. The video has been locally produced and provides a great capacity building tool that can be incorporated into orientation processes for new staff, especially those who might be new to working in regional and remote areas. Watch the video [here](#)

## Changes to the National Immunisation Program

The Australian Government has recently introduced changes to the National Immunisation Program (NIP) to better protect children and adults at increased risk of meningococcal and pneumococcal disease.

Please refer to the updated [WA Immunisation Schedule](#) and the suite of ["Immunisation" HealthPathways](#).

The [Toll ordering system](#) will be updated when the new program vaccines Bexsero® and Prevenar®13 are available to order. The system will also be combining adolescent and adult vaccines under the same tab, and a revised User Guide will soon be available.

Providers can now order for patients with medical risk conditions directly through the [Toll ordering system](#). The Communicable Disease Control Directorate advises that local Public Health Units no longer need to approve splenectomy orders.

In line with these changes, the National Centre Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) have updated the following resources:

- [Haemophilus influenzae type b \(Hib\) vaccines for Australian children Fact sheet](#)
- [Meningococcal vaccines for Australians - Fact sheet](#)
- [Meningococcal vaccines for Australians - FAQs](#)
- [Pneumococcal vaccines for Australians - Fact sheet](#)
- [Vaccines for Australian adults - Fact sheet](#)

In addition, the NCIRS have created new immunisation schedule tables that summarise vaccine recommendations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people:

- [Immunisation schedule for non-Indigenous people](#)
- [Immunisation schedule for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in NT, QLD, SA and WA](#)

Refer also to the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) and [ATAGI clinical advice](#) on these changes.

## Management of Type 2 Diabetes handbook

GPs have a central role in the prevention and management of type 2 diabetes within the community. The RACGP and Diabetes Australia have united to support GPs to manage type 2 diabetes through a new edition of Management of Type 2 Diabetes: A Handbook for General Practice.

Updates include completely new sections on:

- Early-onset type 2 diabetes
- Mental health and type 2 diabetes
- Management of type 2 diabetes in the elderly and residential aged care facilities
- The use of technology in managing type 2 diabetes

The handbook is only available [online](#)

## BreastScreen WA has resumed mammogram screening services

BreastScreen WA has resumed mammogram screening services at metropolitan clinics and rural mobile service.

Clients who have recently been invited to have a screening mammogram are encouraged to contact BreastScreen WA on 13 20 50 or visit the online booking webpage to schedule their appointment.

For more information please visit the [BreastScreen WA website](#) or [Facebook](#) page.

## New patient resources on anxiety and depression

Beyond Blue has released two new booklets designed to help people separate fact from fiction about what really works for managing anxiety and depression. [A guide to what works for anxiety](#) and [A guide to what works for depression](#), reviews and rates the scientific evidence available for 440 psychological, medical and complimentary approaches used to treat anxiety and depression.

## The NPS Doctor's Bag app

The Doctor's Bag is a free app offered by NPS MedicineWise. It is designed to support Australian health professionals during emergencies. The app has two modules:

- The Doctor's Bag module provides recommended doses for drugs in the PBS Prescriber Bag, including adrenaline doses for anaphylaxis and calculators for weight-based dosing in children. It acts as an emergency backup, providing reassurance that the correct dose has been given. It can also be used as an educational tool in non-emergency settings. The information is kept up to date as the contents of the PBS Prescriber Bag change.
- The Anaphylaxis Management module is based on the popular Anaphylaxis: Emergency Management for Health Professionals wallchart published by Australian Prescriber in 2011, and updated in 2018.

The app is available to download free from the [NPS MedicineWise](#) website.

## Dementia Australia new and expanded services

Dementia Australia is rolling out an expanded range of services designed to be accessed by and delivered to people via a range of modes, no matter where they live, including:

- The National Dementia Helpline (1800 100 500) has extended operating hours from 8am – 8pm, Monday to Friday except public holidays
- A new Post Diagnostic Support Program providing people who are newly diagnosed, their families and carers with one-to-one information and support
- Education courses for people living with dementia, their families and carers, including 'Living with Dementia' and the 'Recently Diagnosed with Dementia' program
- Specific services and supports to people diagnosed with Younger Onset Dementia
- [The National Dementia Library service](#)
- The [Dementia Guide](#), which is useful at any stage but particularly on receiving a diagnosis.
- Ongoing awareness-raising activities and campaigns to tackle discrimination, including Dementia Action Week.

## Improved search function within SARA database

In response to requests from stakeholders to provide better access to TGA recall data, the System for Australian Recall Actions (SARA) database's search facility has been successfully completed.

In addition to the existing PDF reports, users can now download search results of summary recall data in editable, MS Excel format.

Access the new functionality at [www.tga.gov.au/recall-actions-database](http://www.tga.gov.au/recall-actions-database).

## New WellMob Indigenous wellbeing website

The [WellMob website](#) provides frontline health and wellbeing workers with easy access to culturally relevant resources to use with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

WellMob brings together over 200 videos, apps, podcasts and other websites in the one place and is free to access.

The website was developed by e-Mental Health in Practice in partnership with the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet.

## New aged care sign language interpreting service

All aged care assessment and delivery services now have access to free sign language and interpreting services to support older Australians who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing to access or engage with Australian Government funded aged care services.

Visit The [Australian Government Department of Health website](#) for more information, including how to register. The Department strongly advises that, when possible, bookings be made well in advance to ensure the availability of an interpreter.

## Bowel Cancer Screening results now in MHR

The Australian Government Department of Health has been working with the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (the Program) pathology service provider, Sonic Healthcare (Sonic) and the Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA) to upload participants results to My Health Record (MHR).

When accessing bowel screening results through the MHR, participants will see a copy of the results letter they will have received from Sonic following testing of their returned samples.

In 2019, the Program's Participant Details form was revised for transition in November to the National Cancer Screening Register and includes a check box on the last page for participants to select if they do not wish their bowel screening results to be uploaded to the MHR. If participants do not have one of the new Participant Details form, they can handwrite on their form 'Do not send reports to My Health Record'.

If a participant's results are uploaded to the MHR and they want it removed, they can do this by:

- Logging into their MHR and removing the result; or
- Contacting the MHR Helpline which is available 24/7 on 1800 723 471.

Please note that participant's bowel screening results are unable to be uploaded to the MHR retrospectively. Further information about MHR is available from [www.myhealthrecord.gov.au](http://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au). For more information, email [emailNBCSP@health.gov.au](mailto:emailNBCSP@health.gov.au)

## Providing telehealth in general practice during COVID-19 and beyond

The Deeble Institute has released a perspectives brief, [Providing telehealth in general practice during COVID-19 and beyond](#). It includes six case studies that demonstrate how telehealth can benefit GPs, maximise equity of access to healthcare, and support patients in developing their own health knowledge and skills.

## Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Carrier Screening

The Royal Australian College of GPs (RACGP) have recently launched an education campaign that aims to raise awareness of spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) and other paediatric neuromuscular disorders. It also aims to give practitioners the knowledge and skills to initiate conversations about carrier screening.

The RACGP have put together a website full of information and resources to help GPs and other healthcare professionals understand the red flags for SMA and learn more about carrier screening for hereditary rare diseases. The website can be found at [bewaretherare.com.au](http://bewaretherare.com.au)

## GP drug and alcohol training programs

Both the Royal Australian College of GPs (RACGP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) are offering addiction education programs for GP members.

The RACGPs [Alcohol and other Drugs GP Education](#) program is available to members via gplearning at no cost. The program was developed to help GPs overcome some of the challenges in treating patients whose health is being impacted by alcohol, prescribed medication or drug use.

For rural and remote GPs, ACRRMs is delivering its [Drug and Alcohol Addiction Education](#) program for GPs to increase knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of addiction issues, and strengthen capacity to address these issues in local communities. The program includes a series of face-to-face workshops, online learning courses and webinars, which are incentivised for eligible ACRRM members.

## GP Education Events

[Sexual Health Update for Primary Care: Clinical and Public Health Management of Syphilis in WA](#)  
ASHM  
Tuesday 25 August

[Webinar: Understanding teenage boys](#)  
RACGP  
Monday 10 September