

Contextualising congenital syphilis cases in national surveillance data

Bright, A¹

¹Office of Health Protection and Response, Australian Government Department of Health

Background/Purpose:

Data reported for nationally notified cases of congenital syphilis have historically been limited to basic demographic information. There has been no mechanism to link congenital syphilis cases with their mother, or method to collect data that enhances understanding of disease morbidity, mortality and gaps in healthcare that may have contributed to the case occurring. Gathering these data is of particular importance given the sustained increase of infectious syphilis notifications among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous women of reproductive age, and the subsequent increases in notifications of congenital syphilis.

Approach:

In consultation with various expert committees and clinicians, the Australian Government Department of Health developed 18 enhanced data fields that sought to contextualise congenital syphilis cases notified to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, including the mothers antenatal care and treatment and clinical condition and signs for the infant. The introduction of the specifications into routine surveillance required close consultation with jurisdictional epidemiologists and data managers, ensuring the resource implications were minimal.

Outcomes/Impact:

The data fields were endorsed by the Communicable Diseases Network Australia and implemented by jurisdictions in 2018, with data were collected retrospectively for cases dating back to 2011. All (n=74) cases of congenital syphilis reported between 2011 and 2021 had enhanced data recorded, creating an informative and unique dataset. These data have bridged a significant information gap at the national level and provided valuable context to notified congenital syphilis cases, including maternal behaviours and risk factors that have likely contributed to the occurrence of congenital syphilis notifications. Analyses using these data have and will continue to inform public health actions and prevention strategies for syphilis among women of reproductive age.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Nothing to declare.