

## **INCREASING SYPHILIS CASES IN NEW ZEALAND: WHY WE SHOULD BE WORRIED**

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**Background:** Syphilis incidence has been on the rise in New Zealand since 2012. Initially this appeared to be confined to men who have sex with men (MSM) but the age groups and sexual behaviour of those affected have been changing in event years. Understanding the changing epidemiology will contribute to control efforts.

**Methods:** Data from the Institute of Environmental Science and Research Ltd (ESR) clinic-based sentinel surveillance and enhanced surveillance for infectious syphilis for 2013-2017 were analysed with a focus on the risk factors for MSM and heterosexual males and females.

**Results:** The number of syphilis cases provisionally reported in 2017 (495) has more than doubled compared to 2015 and is seven times higher than the number reported in 2013. The highest number of cases were reported in males aged 20-39 years, particularly those in the 25-29 year age group, in the Auckland and Wellington regions. Nearly 70% of the cases were reported in MSM and nearly 20% of these cases were also reported as being HIV positive. The highest numbers of cases reported in heterosexual females and males in 2017 were in the 20–39 years age group.

**Conclusion:** Although MSM remain the group most affected by syphilis in New Zealand, with the number of cases increasing significantly in recent years, there has also been a steady increase in cases diagnosed in heterosexual males and females. Current control efforts do not appear to be effective. With the majority of cases reported in heterosexuals occurring in the most common reproductive age groups, there is concern we may see an increase in congenital syphilis.

### **Disclosure of Interest**

Dr Sherwood has no conflicts of interest relevant to this work to disclose.