

Syphilis Contact Tracing in Auckland

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Since 2012 Syphilis has swept its way through Auckland rapidly spreading through regional New Zealand affecting all populations. In response to Auckland's rise in infectious cases a contact tracing initiative was developed by Auckland Sexual Health Services. A team of two sexual health nurses launched and implemented an active process for syphilis contact tracing within Auckland. The contact tracing team's priority is to engage, encourage and empower index cases to inform sexual partners of their potential risk of syphilis.

A growing concern is the impact syphilis is having on New Zealand's most vulnerable populations, particularly those with low health literacy, vulnerable youth, drug and alcohol dependency, mental health issues, limited access to health care, those who are transient and worryingly increasing numbers of pregnant women.

Managing the spread of syphilis has proved a challenge for all health professionals. Traditionally there are elements of stigma and shame associated with having a STI and informing partners of the risk of infection can be a difficult task. In some instances, it is not possible or safe for the index case to contact sexual partners highlighting the need for further contact tracing support. Additional methods of contact used by the contact tracing team include; provider referral, home visiting, social media and liaising with other health professionals.

Syphilis, presumed to be a disease of antiquity by many in the community is poorly understood and this lack of awareness is a significant barrier to contact tracing. We present a case from Auckland to demonstrate the barriers and successes of contact tracing.