

Sexually transmissible and blood-borne infections in Australia: the 2012 Surveillance Reports

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- Australia's new diagnoses of HIV increased by more than eight percent in 2011, to 1137 cases, a 50 per cent rise over 10 years
- Gonorrhoea and chlamydia are increasing; genital warts continue to decline due to the cervical cancer vaccine
- Rates of most STIs are relatively high among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Chlamydia remains the most frequently reported notifiable condition, with 80,800 diagnoses in 2011; young heterosexuals are most affected and the rate of infection is six times higher among remote Aboriginal communities than in non-indigenous people
- Gonorrhoea increased substantially, particularly among men who have sex with men and people in remote Aboriginal communities
- Australia is on track to eliminate donovanosis, without a single case in 2011
- Hepatitis B shows a decline in diagnoses in 2011; hepatitis C remains stable, with a minor decline
- Findings contained in national surveillance reports to be launched in Melbourne today

Rates of chlamydia and gonorrhoea have increased rapidly in 2011, continuing a trend in recent years, and HIV has increased by nine per cent compared to 2008-2010, but an STI more commonly found in the developing world, donovanosis, may be close to eradication in Australia, the latest national surveillance reports show.

The annual *HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report* will be released **today (Wednesday 17 October)** at the Australasian HIV/AIDS Conference 2012 by UNSW's Kirby Institute, as well as the *Bloodborne viral and sexually transmitted infections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Surveillance and Evaluation Report 2012*.

The Surveillance Report indicates that the number of new Australian cases of HIV has increased in 2011, from 1051 new diagnoses in 2010 to 1137 in 2011, an increase from 719 cases in 1999. HIV cases have increased in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. "Some of the rise in reported HIV diagnoses could be attributed to changes in testing trends among men who have sex with men who are the most affected population group," said UNSW Associate Professor David Wilson, head of the Surveillance and Evaluation Program for Public Health at the Kirby Institute. "We believe that between 20 and 30 percent of HIV cases in Australia remain undiagnosed and that earlier diagnosis among these people and initiation of antiretroviral therapy would have large health benefits for the individual and reduce new infections in the community."

The majority of HIV cases in Australia occur among men who have sex with men. By the end of 2011, 31 645 cases of HIV infection had been diagnosed in Australia and an estimated 24 731 people were living with diagnosed HIV infection.

Gonorrhoea has increased by 21 per cent from 10,020 cases diagnosed in 2010 to 12,087 in 2011, continuing an upward trend. Chlamydia remained the most frequently reported notifiable condition in Australia, with 80,800 cases diagnosed in 2011 compared to 74,305 cases in 2010, reflecting increases in testing. "But this is just the tip of the iceberg", said Professor Wilson, "It is likely that there are 4 to 6-times more Australians infected with chlamydia who may be at increased risk of infertility and other sexual health problems". Increased rates of infectious syphilis in 2011 occurred in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. Young heterosexual people had most chlamydia infections while the increase in gonorrhoea has occurred predominantly among men who have sex with men. "Increases in the rate of these sexually transmissible infections, for another year, are of great concern and imply the need for continued efforts in promoting healthy sexual development and lives among young people and other target groups," said Dr Wilson. However, following the introduction of the cervical cancer vaccination programme against human papilloma virus, the proportion of young women aged 21 years or younger who were diagnosed with genital warts dropped from 12.1 per cent in 2007 (when the vaccination program began) to 2.2 per cent in 2011.

The rate of diagnosis of newly acquired hepatitis B infection declined in Australia from 1.4 to 0.8 cases per 100 000 population between 2007 and 2011, while the *per capita* rate of diagnosis of hepatitis B infection in Australia in 2007 to 2011 was stable at around 32 per 100 000 population. An estimated 209 000 people were living in Australia in 2011 with chronic hepatitis B infection, with an estimated 382 deaths. An estimated 226 700 people were living in Australia with chronic hepatitis C infection, including 49 500 with moderate to severe liver disease, indicating a *per capita* rate of diagnosis of hepatitis C infection, which has declined from 57.5 per 100 000 in 2007 to 45.7 per 100 000 population in 2011. Based on reported cases, hepatitis B and hepatitis C transmission in Australia continued to occur predominantly among people with a recent history of injecting drug use. In 2011, chronic hepatitis B infection and chronic hepatitis C infection were the underlying causes of liver disease in 7.8 per cent and 25 per cent of liver transplants, respectively.

The report ***Bloodborne viral and sexually transmitted infections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Surveillance and Evaluation Report 2012***, also to be released today, indicates that chlamydia and gonorrhoea diagnosis rates in the Indigenous population in 2011 were 3-times and 30-times greater than the rates in the non-Indigenous population. "STI rates are particularly higher in regional and very remote areas, reflecting poor access to primary health care services," said Dr Wilson. "Urgent action is required to bring down these rates."

Syphilis is also rising overall in Aboriginal communities in regions consistent with national trends, but particularly among the 15 to 19 year age group. However, syphilis has declined in Aboriginal populations in New South Wales and the Northern Territory. The rates of HIV in the Indigenous population overall are stable and similar to the non-Indigenous population. The elimination of donovanosis from Australia is on track, with no cases detected in 2011 in Australia for the first time during a reporting calendar year.

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Summary of key statistics

HIV infection

- By 31 December 2011, 31 645 cases of HIV infection had been diagnosed in Australia.
- An estimated 24 731 people were living with diagnosed HIV infection in Australia at the end of 2011.
- The number of new HIV diagnoses in Australia in 2011 was 1 137, an increase of 8.2% over the number in 2010. The annual number of new HIV diagnoses has gradually increased over the past 13 years, from 719 diagnoses in 1999.
- Trends in newly diagnosed HIV infection have differed across State and Territory health jurisdictions. After recent declines, there has been a modest increase in the rate of HIV diagnoses in New South Wales - from around 6.1 per 100 000 population in 2002 – 2006 to 4.9 in 2010 and then to 5.4 in 2011. The rate in Victoria increased from 4.1 in 2003 to 5.7 in 2011, resulting in the highest rate among state/territory health jurisdictions in 2011. Increasing rates of HIV diagnosis in Queensland and Western Australia over previous years have stabilised, at around 5.0 and 4.3 per 100 000 population, respectively. There were also increases in reported HIV diagnosis rates over the period 2002 - 2011 in South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and in the Australian Capital Territory.
- HIV continued to be transmitted primarily through sexual contact between men.
- The number of diagnoses of newly acquired HIV infection (i.e. evidence of infection in the last 12 months) in Australia increased by 22.7%, from 308 cases in 2010 to 378 in 2011. In New South Wales, the number increased by 33.9%, from 127 in 2010 to 170 in 2011 whereas 101 cases in Victoria, 61 in Queensland and 29 in Western Australia were diagnosed in 2011, resulting in an increase of 7.4%, 5.2% and 81.2%, respectively, over the number reported in 2010. Use of a laboratory test for detecting recent HIV infection among cases newly diagnosed in 2010, in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, resulted in an increase in cases with evidence of recent HIV infection of 47%.
- The *per capita* rate of HIV diagnosis in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was similar to that in the non-Indigenous population, excluding cases and populations from high HIV prevalence countries. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cases of HIV infection differed from non-Indigenous cases, excluding cases from a high HIV prevalence country, in that a substantially greater proportion were attributed to injecting drug use (16% compared with 2%) in the five years 2007 -- 2011.
- Of 1 327 cases of HIV infection newly diagnosed in 2007 – 2011, for which exposure to HIV was attributed to heterosexual contact, 60% were in people from high prevalence countries or their partners.

Viral hepatitis

- The *per capita* rate of diagnosis of hepatitis B infection in Australia in 2007 – 2011 was stable at around 32 per 100 000 population. The rate of diagnosis of newly acquired hepatitis B infection declined in Australia from 1.4 to 0.8 per 100 000 population between 2007 and 2011.
- An estimated 209 000 people were living in Australia in 2011 with chronic hepatitis B infection. An estimated 382 deaths in 2011 were attributable to chronic hepatitis B infection.
- The *per capita* rate of diagnosis of hepatitis C infection has declined from 57.5 per 100 000 in 2007 to 45.7 per 100 000 population in 2011.

- An estimated 226 700 people were living in Australia with chronic hepatitis C infection, including 49 500 with moderate to severe liver disease.
- The reported annual number of diagnoses of newly acquired hepatitis C infection ranged from 363 to 401 in 2007 – 2011 and accounted for 3.9% of new hepatitis C diagnoses.
- Based on reported cases, hepatitis B and hepatitis C transmission in Australia continued to occur predominantly among people with a recent history of injecting drug use.
- In 2011, chronic hepatitis B infection and chronic hepatitis C infection were the underlying causes of liver disease in 7.8% and 25% of liver transplants, respectively.
- The proportion of people seen at needle and syringe programs who reported having injected drugs for five years or less was stable in 2007 – 2011 at around 10%. Within this group, hepatitis C prevalence declined from 28% in 2007 and 2008 to 21% in 2011, a slight increase from 19% in 2010.

Sexually transmissible infections other than HIV

- Chlamydia was the most frequently reported notifiable condition in Australia in 2011 with 80 800 diagnoses. The population rate of diagnosis of chlamydia in 2011 was 345 per 100 000 population, a 7% increase over the rate in 2010, continuing the increase seen over the past ten years.
- The number of diagnoses of donovanosis declined from 3 in 2007 to 0 in 2011.
- The rate of diagnosis of gonorrhoea increased by 45%, from 36.2 per 100 000 population in 2007 to 52.5 in 2010. The rate of diagnosis of infectious syphilis declined from 6.8 in 2007 to 5.0 in 2010 and increased to 5.7 in 2011. Increased rates of infectious syphilis in 2011 occurred in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.
- Substantially higher rates of diagnosis of chlamydia and gonorrhoea were recorded in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population compared with non-Indigenous population.
- In the past 5 years, more than 75% of men and women seen for the first time through a network of sexual health services were tested for chlamydia. In 2011, the chlamydia positivity rate was highest among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (15.9%) and women (18.9%) and among young heterosexual men and women (16.4% and 15.5%, respectively), and was lowest among female sex workers (6.2%).
- Following the introduction of vaccination against human papilloma virus, the proportion of young women aged 21 years or younger who were diagnosed with genital warts decreased from 12.1% in 2007 to 2.2% in 2011.