



National Syphilis Awareness Campaign

Stakeholder Information Kit

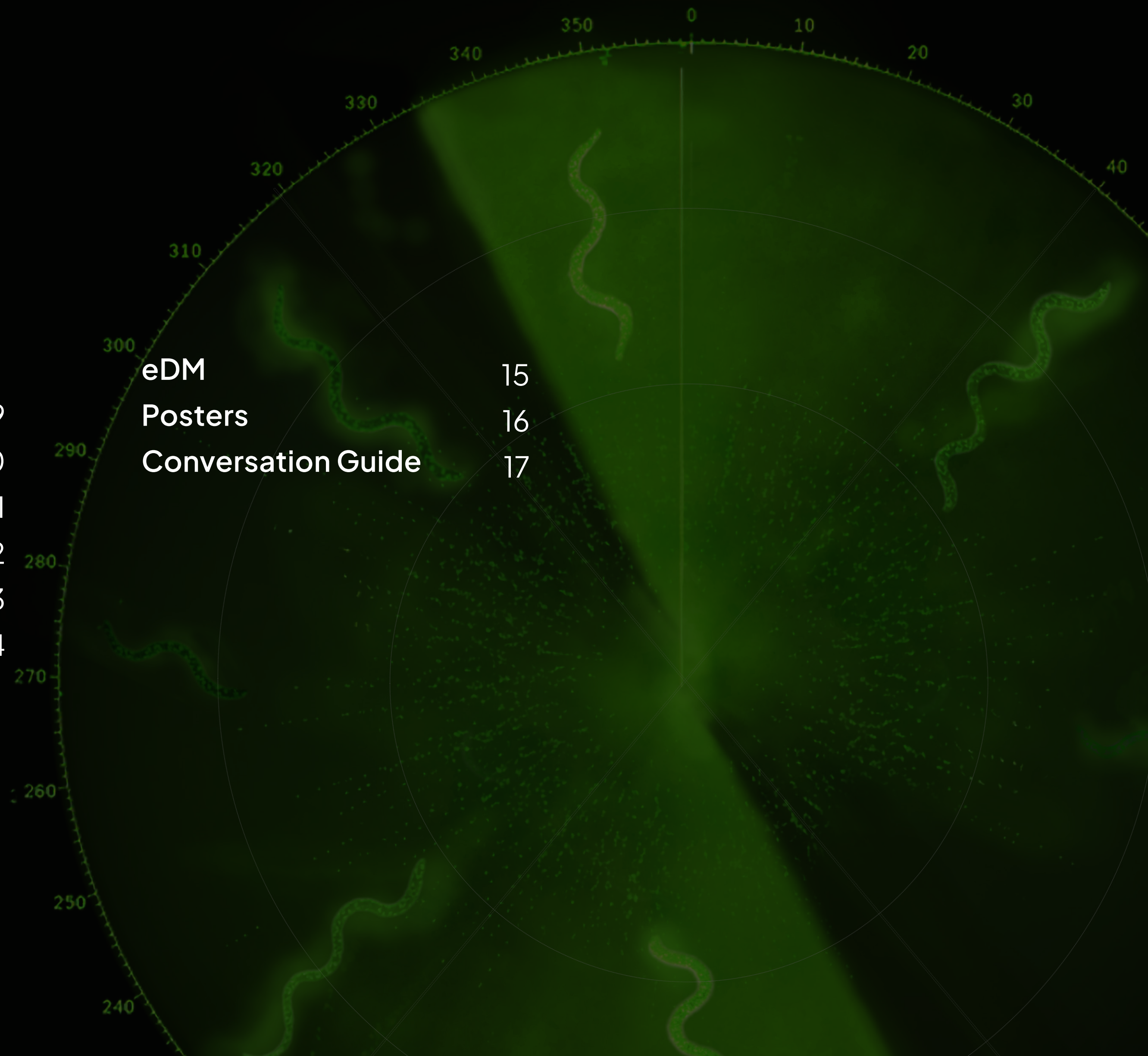
March 2026

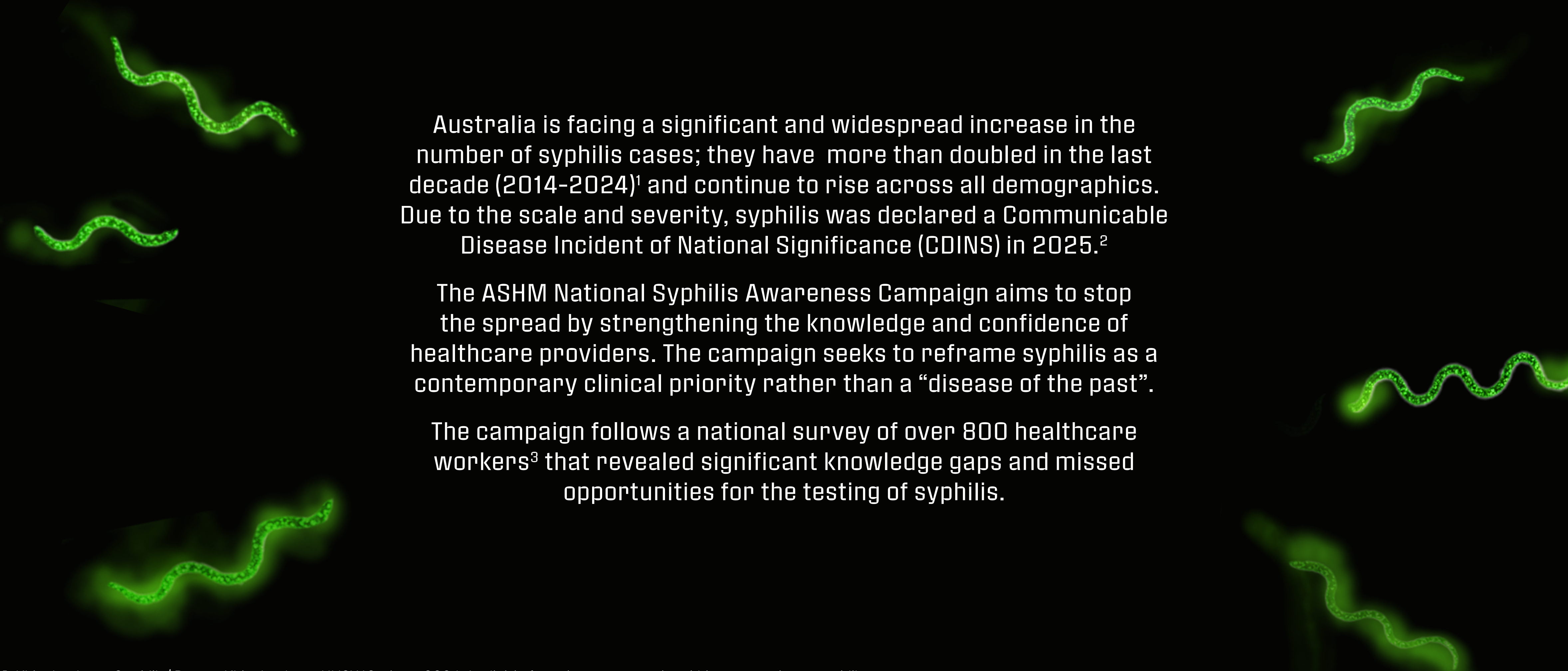


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Australia is facing a significant and widespread increase in the number of syphilis cases; they have more than doubled in the last decade (2014-2024)¹ and continue to rise across all demographics. Due to the scale and severity, syphilis was declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance (CDINS) in 2025.²

The ASHM National Syphilis Awareness Campaign aims to stop the spread by strengthening the knowledge and confidence of healthcare providers. The campaign seeks to reframe syphilis as a contemporary clinical priority rather than a “disease of the past”.

The campaign follows a national survey of over 800 healthcare workers³ that revealed significant knowledge gaps and missed opportunities for the testing of syphilis.

1. Kirby Institute. *Syphilis | Data @ Kirby Institute*. UNSW Sydney; 2024. Available from: <https://www.data.kirby.unsw.edu.au/syphilis>

2. Australian Centre for Disease Control. *Syphilis declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance*. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov.au/diseases/syphilis> [cdc.gov.au]

3. National Syphilis Awareness Campaign Integrated report of qualitative and quantitative research findings 2025, Orima

Key Messages

- Syphilis is no longer a bacterial infection of the past. Reports show that cases have doubled in the decade from 2014 to 2024 and continues to spread further.
- Early detection and symptom awareness saves lives. Syphilis is preventable and easily treated when detected early.
- With almost 50% of syphilis cases often showing no symptoms, routine testing of all sexually active patients is vital to prevent its potentially devastating consequences.
- Screening all sexually active patients, and pregnant people during their antenatal appointments is essential.
- If left untreated, it can cause severe health complications, long-term disability, or death.
- Coordinated action is essential. Preventing the spread of syphilis requires enhanced, coordinated efforts across communities, primary care, specialist services and all levels of the health system.
- The scale and severity of the outbreak has led to syphilis being declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance in 2025.
- Syphilis can affect anyone, but pregnant people, gay, bisexual men who have sex with men, and First Nations communities are disproportionately affected.

Campaign Research Findings

Following the declaration of syphilis as a CDINS, ASHM commissioned a national survey to inform the development of a National Syphilis Awareness Campaign. The primary objective of the research was to strengthen awareness and understanding of syphilis and its clinical management among healthcare workers across Australia.

The sample was diverse across professional roles and settings. Nurses comprised the largest cohort (59%), followed by antenatal providers (24%) and community healthcare workers (18%). Sixteen per cent reported working frequently with First Nations peoples. Most respondents worked in hospital settings (46%) or community/social service settings (33%), with smaller proportions in emergency departments (12%) and general practice clinics (11%).

Geographically, the sample was nationally distributed, with the largest representation from Victoria (26%), New South Wales (25%) and Queensland (22%). The majority of participants were

metro-based (77%), with 23% practising in regional or remote areas. Most respondents were female (80%), 11% identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), and 3% identified as First Nations.

The national survey of 819 healthcare workers was conducted in late 2025 and found:

- **54%** of healthcare professionals do not feel confident about when to test or refer for syphilis.
- **38%** believe it is their responsibility to raise sexual health with patients.
- **88%** feel equipped to test or refer for STIs.
- Only **21%** regularly talk about sexual health with patients.
- **Two-thirds (66%)** incorrectly believe a syphilis test is part of a urine test.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why has syphilis been declared a CDINS?

Syphilis has been declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance (CDINS) in Australia because of a major, ongoing outbreak that has resulted in high case numbers, congenital syphilis cases, and infant deaths.

A CDINS is declared when an outbreak requires coordinated national response. An example of these are COVID-19 and mpox.

Who should I be testing?

Patients presenting with any symptoms suggestive of syphilis.

Anyone who is sexually active, particularly those with new or multiple partners, should get tested for syphilis. Symptoms are often asymptomatic, so it's important to determine risk by taking a sexual history.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Around 50% of people will have no symptoms and will only be diagnosed by screening with serological testing. As syphilis can mimic many other conditions, consider syphilis testing in all patients with unexplained symptoms.

Clinically, the disease has 3 stages:

- **Early infectious syphilis:** primary and secondary and early latent infection, i.e. asymptomatic infection acquired within the previous 2 years.
- **Late latent syphilis,** i.e. asymptomatic infection acquired more than 2 years before diagnosis, or when the duration of infection is unknown.
- **Tertiary or late symptomatic syphilis,** with neurological, cardiovascular or gummatous complications.

For more information on the clinical presentation of syphilis, visit <https://sti.guidelines.org.au/sexually-transmissible-infections/syphilis/>

Frequently Asked Questions

What if my patient has no symptoms?

Around 50% of people will have no symptoms and will only be diagnosed by screening with serological testing.

Due to recent increase in prevalence in the general population, it's important to test all sexually active patients with new or multiple partners.

How should syphilis be managed in pregnancy?

Syphilis infection in a pregnant person may be transmitted to the foetus and can cause multi-organ disease associated with high rates of mortality and morbidity. Congenital syphilis is preventable if the pregnant person is treated less than 30 days before delivery. If you have a patient who has been diagnosed with syphilis during pregnancy, seek specialist advice.

Is syphilis easy to treat?

Syphilis is highly curable with antibiotics. For more information on the management of syphilis, visit the STI management guidelines, <https://sti.guidelines.org.au/sexually-transmissible-infections/syphilis/>

What are my responsibilities for contact tracing and notification?

The diagnosing clinician is responsible for initiating and documenting a discussion about contact tracing. Identified sexual contacts of the person with syphilis infection must be informed and offered testing. Tracing should be carried out according to sexual history and clinical stage of infection. Syphilis registers and Public Health Units can provide support. See [STI Management Guidelines](#) for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if syphilis testing isn't part of my role?

We all have a role to play in putting syphilis on our radar and helping to stop the spread. Any GP can provide STI testing, including syphilis testing, and a 'no wrong door' approach means people should be supported to access testing wherever they engage with a health service. Even if you are in a non-clinical role, you can help by encouraging testing, discussing STI risk, reducing stigma, and recognising possible signs and symptoms. This is particularly important for workers supporting priority populations, including people accessing drug and alcohol services, homelessness services, mental health and family violence services, and services for young people and LGBTI+ communities.

What if my practice doesn't have people who would be at risk of syphilis?

Anyone who is sexually active can contract Syphilis. Don't make assumptions about a patient and their sex lives or the sex lives of their partners. 1 in 6 Australians will get an STI in their lifetime. Source: <https://www.cdc.gov.au/advice/preventing-spread-sexually-transmissible-infections>

Social Tiles

GPs

LINKEDIN

Copy: Syphilis is no longer a bacterial infection of the past. Infection rates are rising steeply and can affect anyone who is sexually active. With syphilis cases often showing no symptoms, routine testing of all sexually active patients is vital to preventing its potentially devastating consequences. Visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis for resources that can stop syphilis slipping through.

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

META

Copy: Syphilis is back. Routine testing of all sexually active patients is vital to preventing its potentially devastating consequences. Learn more at ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

1080 pixels (w) x 1080 pixels (h) - GPs



Download social tiles

Social Tiles

Nurses

1080 pixels (w) x 1080 pixels (h) - Nurses

LINKEDIN

Copy: As a frontline nurse, put syphilis on your radar to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. Syphilis cases are increasing across all demographics in Australia. All sexually active patients may be at risk. Help prevent the spread of syphilis by encouraging proactive testing and treating early. Visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis for resources that can stop syphilis slipping through.

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

META

Copy: As a frontline nurse, you can help prevent the spread of syphilis by encouraging proactive testing and treating early. Learn more at ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more



Download social tiles

Social Tiles

Antenatal

LINKEDIN

Copy: Testing all pregnant people for syphilis at least 3 times throughout their pregnancy is the best way to prevent the spread and reduce health impacts on the pregnant person and baby. Stop syphilis from slipping through, visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis

Headline: Test for syphilis.

CTA: Learn more

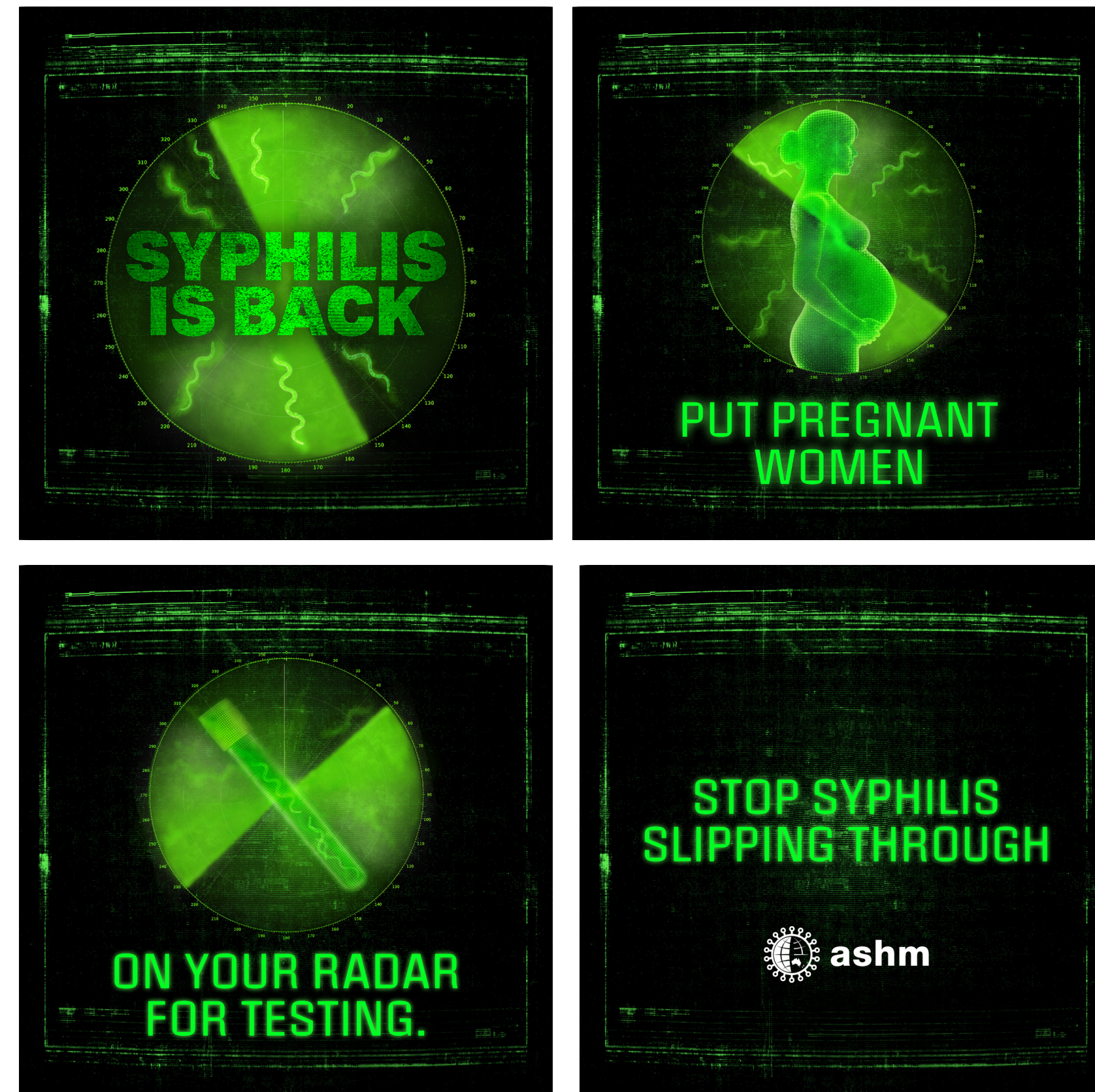
META

Copy: Testing pregnant people at least 3 times during their pregnancy is the best way to prevent congenital syphilis. Learn more at ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis

Headline: Test for syphilis.

CTA: Learn more

1080 pixels (w) x 1080 pixels (h) - Antenatal



Download social tiles

Social Tiles

Specialists

LINKEDIN

Copy: As a specialist, you have a critical role to play in reducing the transmission of syphilis and its health impacts. Known as ‘the great imitator’, you may have clients presenting with syphilis and not know it. Preventing the spread requires enhanced, coordinated efforts across communities, primary care, specialist services and all levels of the health system. Visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis for resources that can stop syphilis slipping through.

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

META

Copy: As a specialist, you may have clients presenting with syphilis and not know it. Early detection can prevent the spread. Learn more at ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

1080 pixels (w) x 1080 pixels (h) – Specialists



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Social Tiles

Community

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LINKEDIN

Copy: Cases of syphilis have doubled over the last decade and all sexually active people are at risk. You can prevent the spread by leading conversations about syphilis and encouraging proactive testing in your community. Visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis for resources that can help support the fight.

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

META

Copy: You can prevent the spread of syphilis by leading conversations and encouraging proactive testing in your community. Learn more at ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more



Download social tiles

Social Tiles

Aboriginal Health

LINKEDIN

Copy: Protecting your community from syphilis has never been more important. With cases doubling over the last decade and almost 50 percent of cases presenting as asymptomatic, your Mob may be at risk. Protect your community by putting syphilis on your radar. Visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis for resources that can help support the fight.

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

META

Copy: Protecting your community from syphilis has never been more important. Proactive testing can prevent the spread. Learn more at ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis/

Headline: Put syphilis on your radar.

CTA: Learn more

1080 pixels (w) x 1080 pixels (h) – Aboriginal Health



Download social tiles

eDM



Heading:

Put it on your radar.

Body Copy:

Syphilis cases in Australia have doubled in the last decade. The next case could be in your waiting room—and someone you least expect.

You can prevent the spread by proactively testing pregnant patients, sexually active patients with new or multiple partners, and others who may be at risk.

Visit ashm.org.au/stopsyphilis for resources. Together, we can stop syphilis slipping through.

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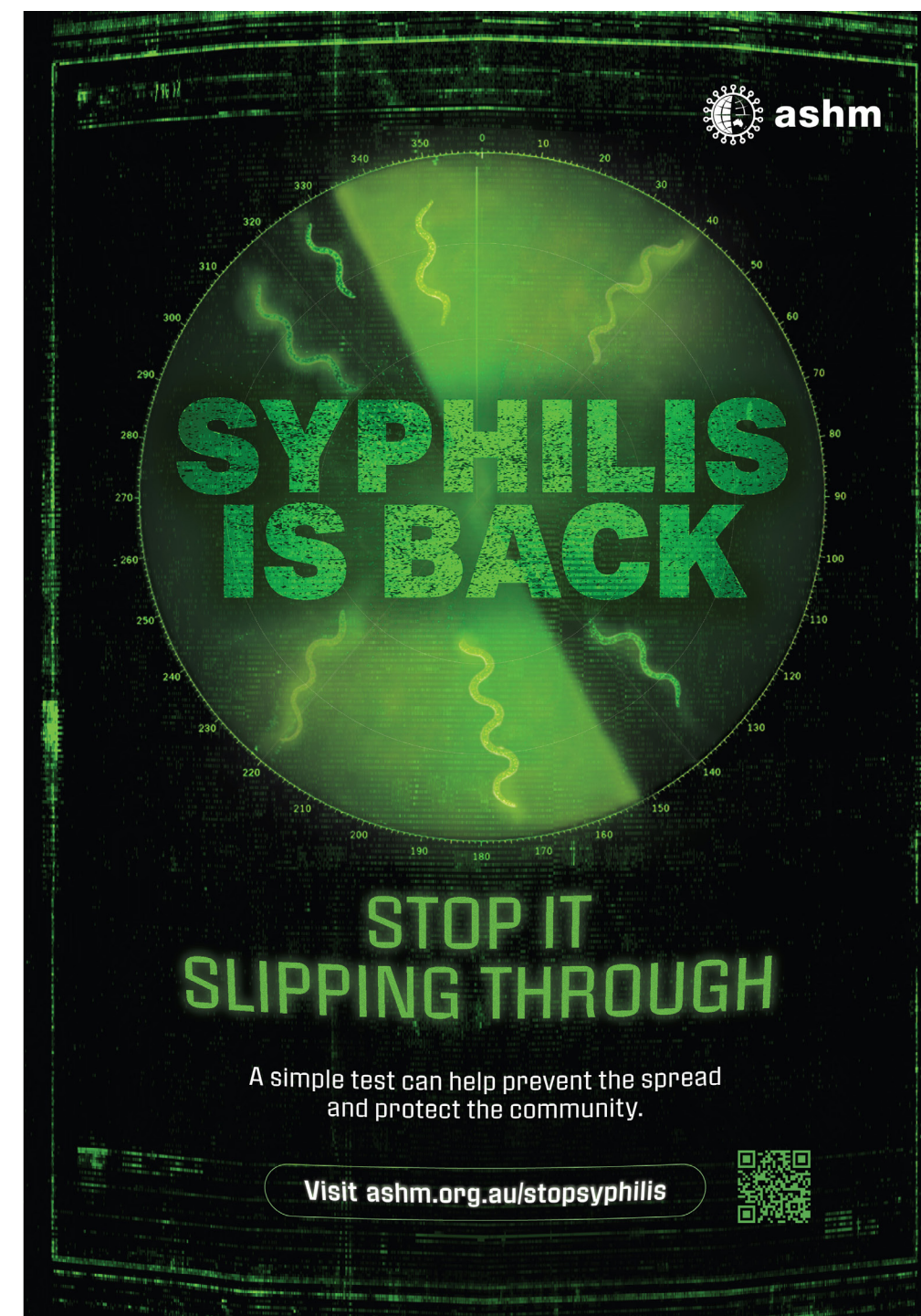
Download eDM image

Posters

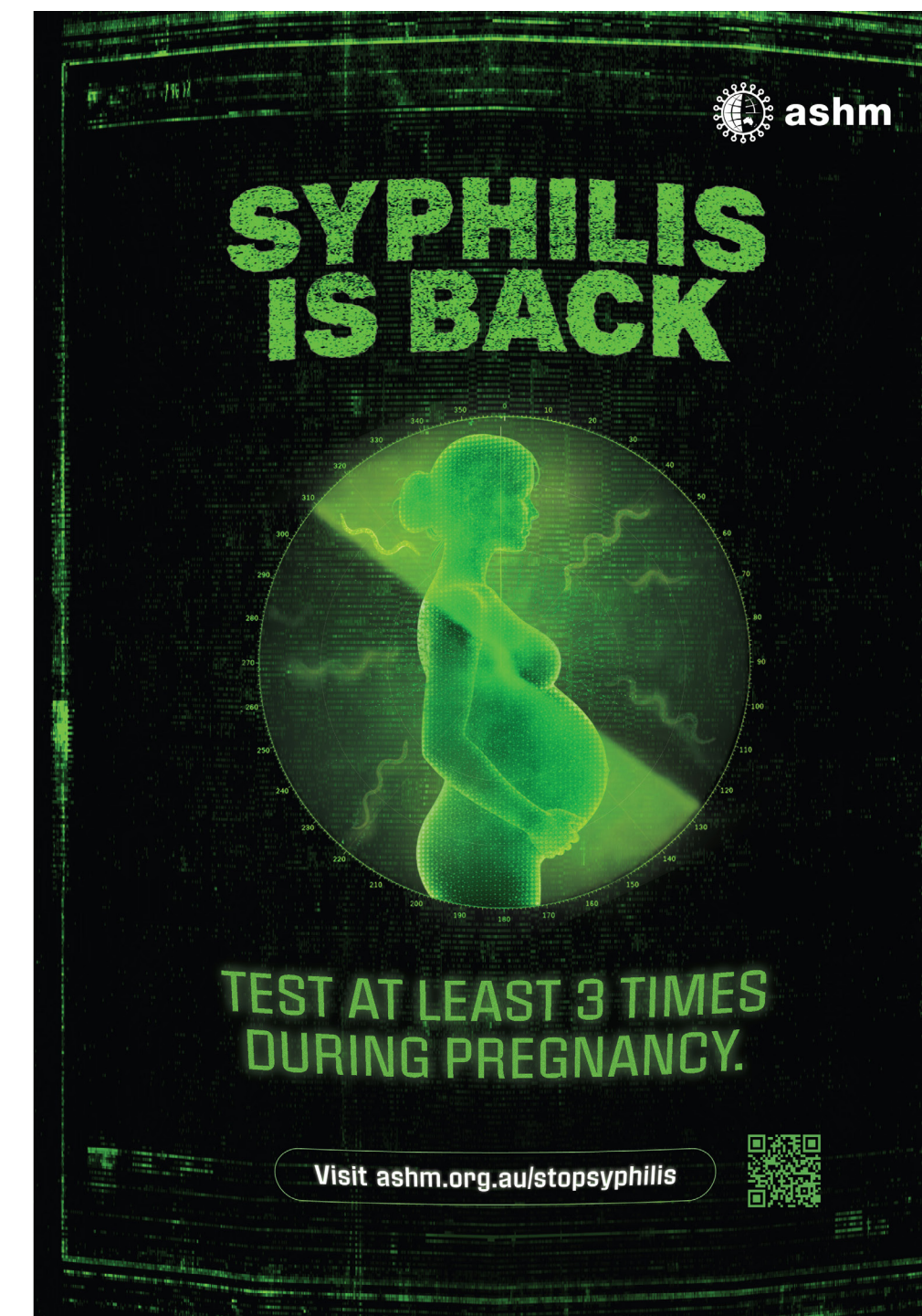
Brand poster for printing, file prepared in CYMK. Posters featuring hero messages for brand, antenatal, and First Nations audiences.

Use link beneath images to download.

A3 - Brand



A3 - Antenatal



A3 - First Nations



Download posters

Conversation Guide

A4 Print



This conversation guide has been developed to assist all healthcare workers with patient conversations around syphilis testing and diagnosis.

The guide includes:

- How to approach the conversation
- Key moments for the conversation
- Conversation starters

Syphilis notifications continue to rise across Australia.¹ Early detection and routine testing are critical to preventing complications, including congenital syphilis. Integrating sexual health discussions into everyday clinical care ensures syphilis testing becomes a standard part of preventive health practice.

DID YOU KNOW

- Around **50% of people** will have NO symptoms and will only be diagnosed by screening with serological testing.²
- Cases have **doubled in the last decade**, and are not isolated to high-risk populations.¹
- In 2025, syphilis was declared as a **Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance**.³

APPROACHING THE CONVERSATION

It's important to convey that syphilis is nothing to be ashamed of and raising awareness will help more people get tested and treated so we can stop the spread of the disease.

- Normalise testing as routine, not exceptional: Present syphilis testing as a part of everyday preventative health care.
- Emphasise the importance of early detection and prevention: Clearly explain why timely testing matters.
- Adopt a proactive approach to testing, given how often syphilis presents without symptoms.
- Ensure conversations are culturally safe and sensitive to individual context, including experiences of stigma or discrimination.
- Integrate testing conversations into relevant clinical moments. Use routine clinical interactions as opportunities to discuss syphilis sensibly and effortlessly.
- Reinforce that testing is quick, safe, and beneficial. It's a simple test and the treatments are highly effective.
- Explain that all discussions are confidential and that, if the test result is positive, sexual partners can be notified anonymously if desired.

KEY MOMENTS FOR CONVERSATION

It can be hard to bring up syphilis when you are speaking with your clients/patients. Some key opportunities for conversation could be:

- When discussing pregnancy plans
- A patient shows possible symptoms
- You're doing any STI check-up
- If they are part of a high priority population
- If they are reproductive age and have recently travelled overseas
- If they have asked about HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or post-exposure prophylaxis PEP
- They present with another STI or have had a partner with another STI
- If the patient tells you they have new or multiple partners
- If they are getting full blood work done on their general health
- If you are discussing contraception

Here are some conversation starters that may help prompt a discussion about syphilis to help identify any concerns or gaps in management.

Align with guidelines and policies

- "Australian pregnancy guidelines recommend these tests to protect you and your baby."
- "As someone who is a man who has sex with men, STI testing is recommended every 3 months..."

Explain rationale

- "Given your symptoms, I'd like to run a few tests to figure out what might be going on. These tests will include syphilis and..."
- "Anyone who has ever had sex can get syphilis, and the only way to know for sure is by getting tested."

Contextualise and normalise

- "When was the last time you had an STI test?"
- "As part of your health check we also ask about your sexual health. I ask everyone the same questions and your answers will help me work out what tests to do."
- "Early treatment is simple and highly effective."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THE STOP SYPHILIS INFORMATION HUB, OR SCAN HERE TO FIND OUT MORE.

This conversation guide has been developed in collaboration with two nurses and two GPs from Australia.

REFERENCES

1. Phua G, White C. The resurgence of syphilis in Australia. Aust J Gen Pract. 2024 Mar;53(3):133-137. doi:10.31128/AJGP-08-23-6943 2. South Australian Government. SA Health. Syphilis for health professionals [Internet]. Adelaide (SA): SA Health; Available from: https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public-content/sa-health-internet/clinical-resources/clinical+programs+and+practice+guidelines/infectious+disease+control/syphilis/syphilis-for-health-professionals 3. Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. Syphilis declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance [Internet]. Canberra (AU): Department of Health; 7 Aug 2025. Available from: https://www.health.gov.au/news/syphilis-declared-cdms?language=en

Download guide



Thank you

If you have any questions regarding these guidelines,
please contact ASHM or Think HQ at:

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