

Syphilis Outbreak in Nunavut: 2013 Summary



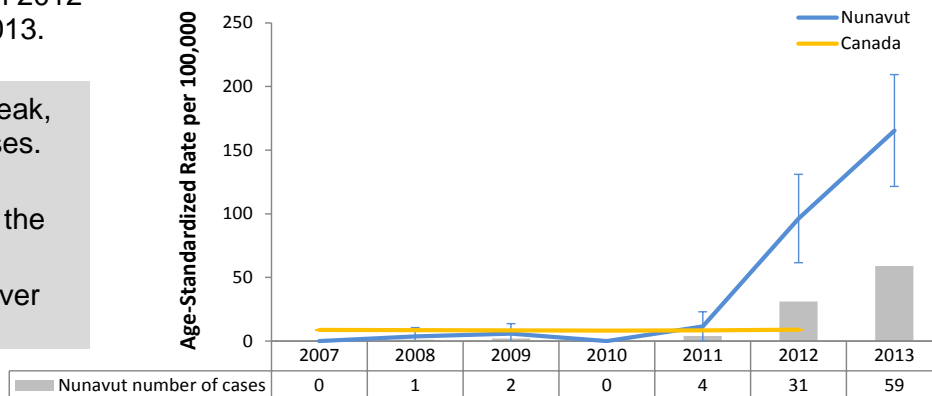
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 Building Nunavut Together
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 Bâtir le Nunavut ensemble

Syphilis is a serious bacterial infection that is spread during sex. Symptoms can include sores around the genitals, mouth, or anus, and rash on the palms or feet. Many people with syphilis do not show any signs but can still pass on the infection to others. If untreated, it can cause serious damage to the heart, brain, and other organs, and can even lead to death. Syphilis has been on the rise throughout Canada.

From 2007–2011, syphilis was rare in Nunavut with 0–4 cases reported annually. An outbreak started in 2012 and continued to increase in 2013.

- Since the start of the outbreak, there were 90 reported cases.
- 59 cases were reported in 2013, nearly double (47%) the previous year's count.
- Nunavut's 2012 rate was over 10 times the national rate.

Syphilis Age-Standardized Incidence Rate, Nunavut and Canada, 2007-2013*

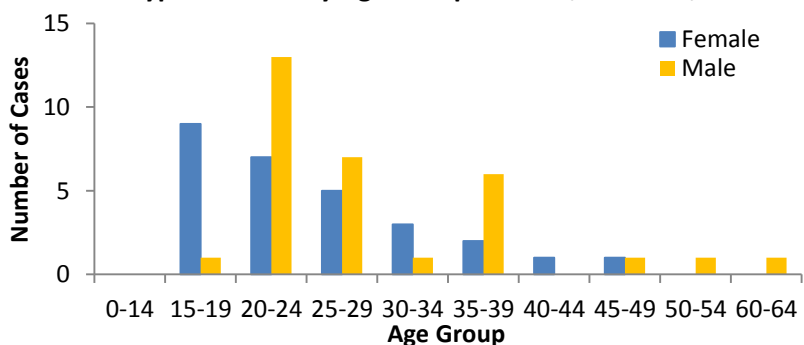


Who was affected?

Syphilis is most often sexually transmitted, and anyone can be infected with syphilis. Understanding what social groups were most affected in the outbreak can help guide health promotion efforts.

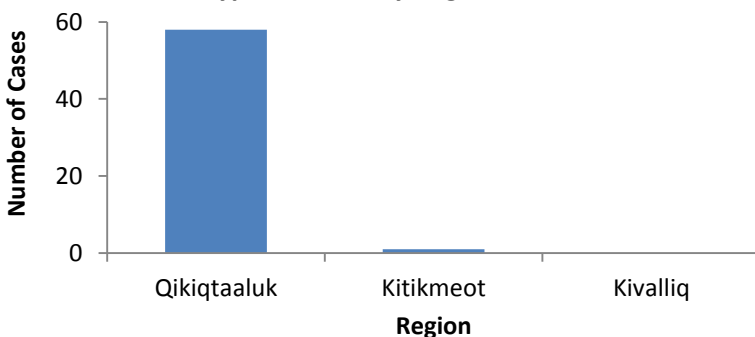
- Younger people were being affected. The average age of cases decreased from 34 years in 2012 to 27 years in 2013.
- Over half of cases were male (53%), but the youngest age group had a higher proportion of female cases.

Syphilis Cases by Age Group and Sex, Nunavut, 2013



- More communities were affected in 2013. Cases were reported in 5 communities in 2013, which increased from 1 community in 2012.

Syphilis Cases by Region, Nunavut, 2013



*Age-standardized to the 1991 Canadian population. 2013 Canadian data was not available.

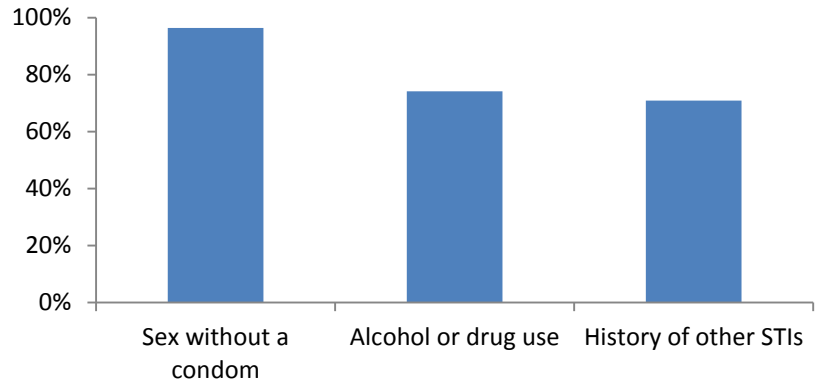
Prevention, testing, and treatment

Practicing safer sex is an important part of preventing the spread of syphilis and reducing the outbreak.

For syphilis cases in 2013:

- Almost all (96%) reported having sex without a condom.
- 74% reported alcohol or drug use, which can affect judgment around safe sex.
- 71% reported being infected with another sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the past year.

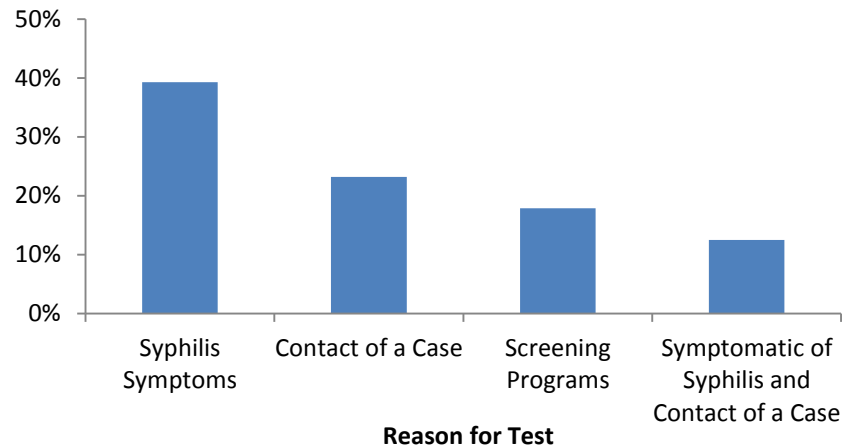
Reported Risk Factors among Syphilis Cases in the Year before Syphilis Diagnosis, Nunavut, 2013



Testing for syphilis and other STIs helps to ensure people get the treatment they need as early as possible. Syphilis is diagnosed with a blood test and can be treated with antibiotics.

- 39% reported getting testing because of symptoms. Many people infected with syphilis do not show symptoms and also need to get tested.
- 18% of cases were diagnosed from screening programs (such as STI and prenatal screening). This increased from 6% in 2012.

Reported Reason for Getting Testing among Syphilis Cases, Nunavut, 2013



Protect yourself and others; but most importantly respect yourself and your body.

- Use condoms every time you have sex.
- Get tested. Get treated. A blood test can determine if you have syphilis.
- Stop the spread of STIs by asking your partners to get tested.

For more information, visit www.irespectmyself.ca, ask your Community Health Representative, or go to your local health centre or public health.