

TRANSLATING SURVEILLANCE INTO ACTION: REDUCING GASTROENTERITIS IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

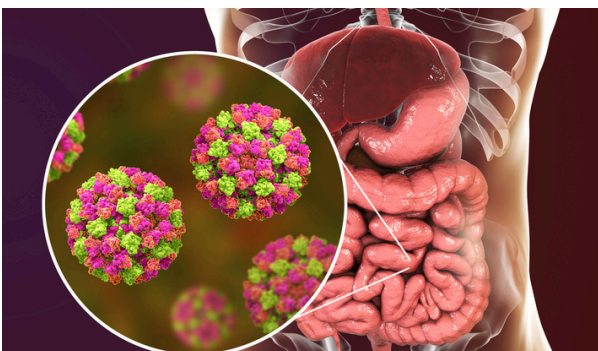
Case Study

Rational

In late January 2026, local councils reported an increase in gastroenteritis cases within the community. This coincided with routine surveillance identifying a rise in outbreaks across children's services in the Loddon Mallee region. By February 2026, outbreaks had surged to 140% above baseline levels across the state.

The impacts of gastroenteritis are widespread. Outbreaks in children's services disrupt families through lost work and childcare challenges. Staff and educators also experience significant strain as they manage increased illness and operational pressures. As a highly infectious illness, gastroenteritis can easily spread to other family members and the broader community, compounding its impact.

In response, the Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU) acted early, launching a targeted campaign to support services and provide information to the community to help prevent the spread of illness.



Objectives

As gastroenteritis outbreaks began to rise, there was a need for clear, early, and coordinated action.

The response focused on:

- Supporting families to understand how to prevent the spread of gastroenteritis at home.
- Ensuring children's services were aware of the increased risk and ready to implement outbreak management measures.
- Assisting councils in responding to growing community concern.
- Supporting councils to manage increased demand associated with gastroenteritis outbreaks, including the development of facility guidance and practical resources.

At a glance

Reducing the spread of gastroenteritis means:

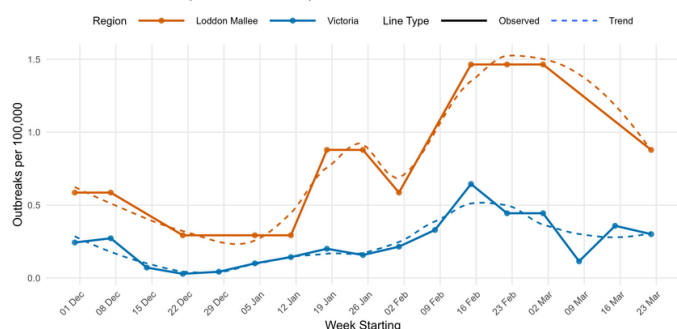
- less hospitalisations and complications
- reduced healthcare burden
- protects the most vulnerable within the community
- reduced impacts on carers and families
- less economic impacts

- Graph below shows trends of gastroenteritis outbreaks in Loddon Mallee and across the State. Note intervention by Loddon Mallee began early February and outbreaks started to decrease mid February.

- To support consistent messaging the following resources were developed and made available on our website:
- [Viral Gastroenteritis in childcare - factsheet for parents and guardians](#)
- [Faecal sample collections instructions for parents and guardians.](#)

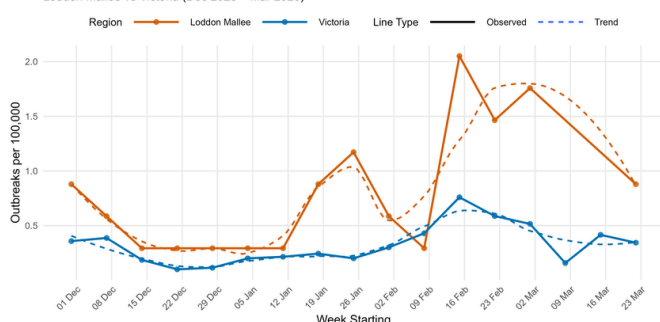
Child Care Gastroenteritis Outbreak Trends

Standardised per 100,000 population
Loddon Mallee vs Victoria (Dec 2025 – Mar 2026)



Gastroenteritis Outbreak Trends

Standardised per 100,000 population
Loddon Mallee vs Victoria (Dec 2025 – Mar 2026)



What we did

A coordinated response was implemented across the region, including:

- Launch of a targeted a social media campaign
- At the same time, direct communication with childcare centres and Environmental Health teams in the 9 Local Government areas in Loddon Mallee to ensure services were alert to the increased risk

Viral Gastroenteritis (Gastro)

Cases are on the rise in the Loddon Mallee region.

Symptoms of gastro

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Stomach pain or cramps

Lessons learnt

- Communication needs to be multifaceted.
- Strong stakeholder engagement is essential to building gastroenteritis case surveillance in the community.
- For successful engagement, all relevant stakeholders need to be informed, involved and supported.

Outcome/impact

This coordinated communication campaign reached families, services and local partners through social media, newsletters, direct emails and website content.

Facebook posts generated strong engagement, with two posts reaching 22,382 views and 565 interactions, extending key prevention messages across the community. The LMPHU newsletter was distributed to 1,164 recipients, with 308 views and 59 clicks, supporting more detailed information sharing with stakeholders.

Direct communication ensured targeted reach, with emails sent to 139 children's services and all nine local government areas, reinforcing consistent messaging and preparedness across the region.

Community interest in gastroenteritis information increased significantly, reflected in a 1,217% rise (n=4,632) in views of the LMPHU gastroenteritis webpage. Together, these outcomes demonstrate strong reach and engagement, supporting increased awareness and timely action to help reduce the spread of illness.

Next steps

- Continued surveillance of gastroenteritis trends.
- Continue to evaluate and improve accessibility of LMPHU resources.
- Continue to work with key stakeholder on co-designing local resources

A 29% decrease in gastroenteritis from children's services notifications was observed post the LMPHU communication campaign. Noting this decrease may also result from multiple factors including reduced community transmission.

This communication campaign resulted in an increase of **1 217 %** (n=4632) views to the LMPHU gastroenteritis webpage.

May 2026