

ISSUED DATE: November 20, 2025

TO: Children's Division Contracted Staff

FROM: Sara Smith, Children's Division Director

SUBJECT: SAFE-CARE Referrals and Recommendations

OVERVIEW:

Pursuant to Section 210.146, RSMo., all investigations involving victim children under the age of four must include either an evaluation of the child or a review of the child's case file and any photographs of the child's injuries by a SAFE-CARE provider. Policy requires workers to make these statutory referrals as soon as possible, but **no later than seventy-two (72) hours** from the call time to CANHU by submitting the SAFE-CARE Provider Evaluation Referral (CD-231) to DSS.CD.SafeCareReferral@dss.mo.gov. The statute acknowledges that infants and toddlers are especially susceptible to physical abuse and ensures a higher level of protection and care for Missouri's most vulnerable children.

Staff are reminded that SAFE-CARE providers are available for all children, not only children under the age of four. See [Section 2, Ch. 5.3.4, SAFE-CARE Program](#) for further information and provider listing.

A quarterly report is sent to Regional Directors by the CA/N Program Specialist to review with their Circuit Managers to ensure compliance with the requirements of 210.146. From April 2024 through August 2025, data regarding timely completion of SAFE-CARE referrals has hovered between 40-45% completion for the entire state. Regional and circuit level staff should review the report to determine what enhancements can be made for improvement.

Workers should recognize the expertise and follow the recommendations of the SAFE-CARE provider and make every effort to facilitate the occurrence of evaluations or case file reviews. If there are circumstances where the recommendation cannot be followed or there are questions regarding the recommendation, workers should contact the SAFE-CARE provider directly to discuss any barriers to following the recommendation, to clarify why the recommendation was made, and to share any information the worker has received since making the referral. If the SAFE-CARE provider's recommendations were not followed, the worker must document the reason in the computer information system (FACES), as well as any other conversation with the SAFE-CARE provider.

Staff are also reminded that pursuant to Section 210.146, RSMo., when a SAFE-CARE provider makes a diagnosis that a child three years of age or younger has been subjected to physical abuse, including but not limited to symptoms indicative of abusive bruising, fractures, burns, abdominal injuries, or head trauma, and reports such diagnosis to the children's division, the division shall immediately submit a referral to the juvenile

officer. The referral shall include the division's recommendations to the juvenile officer regarding the care, safety, and placement of the child and the reasons for those recommendations.

NECESSARY ACTIONS

- Review this Practice Alert with all leadership, supervisory, and investigative staff, and any other staff that are responsible for responding to CA/N reports.
- Review [Section 2, Ch. 5.3.5, Investigations Involving Children under Four](#).
- Review [Section 2, Ch. 5.3.4, SAFE-CARE Program](#).
- Send completed SAFE-CARE Provider Evaluation Referrals (CD-231) to DSS.CD.SafeCareReferral@dss.mo.gov.
- [Regional Directors share quarterly data with Circuit Managers](#).
- [Circuit Managers review data with Chief Investigators to determine if improvement plans should be implemented for any investigator not meeting the requirement](#).

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CHILD WELFARE MANUAL POLICY AND COLLATERAL DOCUMENTATION: Section 2, Ch. 5.3.4, SAFE-CARE Program Section 2, Ch. 5.3.5, Investigations Involving Children Under Four Section 2, Ch. 6.1.2, Children Under the Age of Four Diagnosed as a Victim of Physical Abuse	