



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

Professional Standards and Guidelines

Reporting a Child in Need of Protection

Preamble

This document is a standard of the Board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia.

College's Position

All physicians are required by law to report a child in need of protection. In the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA)*, a child is defined as someone under the age of 19. Physicians must be aware of this duty and circumstances that must be reported under the *CFCSA*.

Physicians who believe that a child needs protection under section 13 of the *CFCSA* must promptly report the matter to a child protection social worker. Physicians must not assume that another person has made a report or that if the child or family is receiving services from the ministry, that the ministry is already aware of the concern.

Physicians are also responsible to consider whether children are potentially at risk when they assess a parent/caregiver with a mental or physical condition which may affect their ability to provide care.

The duty to report overrides the confidential requirements of the patient-physician relationship to the extent required to provide the information necessary to fulfill the reporting obligation; however, any information not necessary to fulfill this obligation remains covered by patient-physician confidentiality. Once the concern has been reported, the documentation of the concern and other information in the physician's chart are subject to patient-physician confidentiality requirements. Therefore, that documentation may only be provided with the patient's consent, or in accordance with specific court orders, or legislation. The current legislation does not provide for an exception to the physician's confidentiality requirement, with respect to patient records.

Failure to report a child who is believed to need protection is an offence under the Act.

Physicians cannot be held liable for reporting child protection concerns unless they knowingly report false information.

Questions should be referred to a child protection social worker. If the child is in immediate danger, physicians must call 9-1-1 or the local police.

Circumstances That Must Be Reported

The *CFCSA* sets out the circumstances under which a child needs protection. Physicians must report when they have reason to believe that:

- a child has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a parent/caregiver or another person and the parent/caregiver is unwilling or unable to protect the child,
- the child has been or is likely to be physically harmed because of neglect by the child's parent/caregiver,
- the child is emotionally harmed by living in a situation where there is domestic violence by or towards a person with whom the child resides,
- the child is deprived of necessary health care,
- the child's development is likely to be seriously impaired by a treatable condition and the child's parent/caregiver refuses to provide or consent to treatment,
- the child's parent/caregiver is unable or unwilling to care for the child and has not made adequate provisions for the child's care,
- the child is or has been absent from home in circumstances that endanger the child's safety or well-being,
- the child's parent/caregiver is dead and adequate provision has not been made for the child's care,
- the child has been abandoned and adequate provision has not been made for the child's care, or
- the child is living in a situation where there is domestic violence by or towards a person with whom the child resides.

How to Contact a Child Protection Social Worker

The fastest, easiest way to report a concern to a child protection social worker is to call the Helpline for Children, any time of the day or night. The person who answers will make sure all concerns are directed appropriately. The Helpline for Children is **310-1234**. An area code is not required.

During working hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) call:

- the local Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) office listed in the blue pages of the phone book or online at <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/sda/contacts.htm>
- the local Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency listed in the white pages of the phone book or online at www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated/pdf/agency_list.pdf
- Enquiry BC – ask for the local MCFD office or Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency nearest you
 - Metro Vancouver – 604-660-2421
 - Greater Victoria – 250-387-6121

- elsewhere in BC – 1-800-663-7867

After hours (Monday to Friday 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m., and all day Saturday, Sunday and statutory holidays) for both MCFD and Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agencies, call:

- Vancouver, North Shore, Richmond – 604 660-4927
- Lower Mainland, Burnaby, Delta, Maple Ridge, Langley – 604 660-8180
- in any community in BC – 1-800-663-9122

Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD)

Call toll-free 1-866-660-0505, province-wide and 24 hours a day.

What to Report to the Child Protection Social Worker

Reports may be made by telephone, letter or in person. The child welfare worker will want to know:

- the child's name and location
- whether there are any immediate concerns about the child's safety
- why you believe the child is at risk
- any statements or disclosures made by the child
- the child's age and vulnerability
- information about the family, parent/caregivers and alleged offender
- information about siblings or other children who may be at risk
- whether you know of any previous incidents involving, or concerns about the child
- information about other persons or agencies closely involved with the child and/or family
- information about other persons who may be witnesses or may have information about the child
- information about the nature of the child's disabilities, his or her mode of communication, and the name of a key support person, and
- any other relevant information concerning the child and/or family, such as language or culture

At the time the report is made, the child protection social worker will request details of the child and family and information about the physician's concerns. Records supporting the physician's specific concerns may also be requested if they exist and the physician may release that information without consent under section 14 of the *CFCSA*.

Information that may be requested by the child protection social worker after a report has been received and an investigation begun

During the investigation, the physician may be contacted by ministry staff and requested to provide further details or a written report related to the report of a child in need of protection. Physicians may release that additional information

- with the written consent of the patient (or legal guardian), or
- pursuant to a court order under section 65 of the *CFCSA*.

Physicians involved in situations of child abuse or neglect should refer to [The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect](#) available from the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

All discussions with family members, colleagues, child protection authorities, the police and authorities in the context of making the report should be documented in the patient's medical record.

Physicians are encouraged to contact their own legal counsel or the Canadian Medical Protective Association for legal advice regarding specific situations.

Other Organizations

The following organizations may provide additional support and guidance; however, contacting them does not replace a physician's obligation to make a child protection report to the Ministry of Children and Family Development or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency:

- Child Protection Teams in BC:
 - Child Protection Service Unit BC Children's Hospital 604-875-3270
 - Northern Health SCAN Clinic Prince George 250-565-2120
 - Health Evaluation, Assessment and Liaison (HEAL) Team Surrey Memorial Hospital 604-585-5634
 - Vancouver Island Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Team Nanaimo 250-755-7945
 - Kamloops Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Clinic Royal Inland Hospital 250-314-2775
- Representative for Children and Youth at 1-800-476-3933 (confidential for all of BC) – responsibilities of the representative include advocating and supporting children and youth, protecting their rights, and making the child protection system more responsive, particularly for those who are most vulnerable