

## **Polk County Protocols for Drug Endangered Children**

### **Definition**

A Drug-Endangered Child (DEC) is a child who has been exposed to an active or inactive illicit drug lab AND/OR precursors to manufacture illicit drugs are present, AND/OR there are illicit drugs or paraphernalia present AND the minor child (under 18 years of age) lives or is expected to return to the property (as in a day care home, etc.) in the immediate future. These are environments with conditions of contamination or hazardous life styles that result in abuse, life or health endangerment, or neglect perpetrated on the child as a result of illicit drug use, sales, or manufacturing. A criminal violation threshold is met when elements of the contamination or hazardous life style meet the criteria of Iowa Statutes.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Drug Endangered Children Program is to identify and protect drug endangered children and to identify, provide, and improve services to them utilizing the criminal justice system, law enforcement, child welfare, juvenile court, and other community agencies with the goal of improving outcomes for these children.

### **Purpose**

In the interest of protecting children found in or near laboratories or homes serving as distribution sites, the Drug Endangered Children Team project has developed a multi-agency cooperative effort involving the Iowa Department of Public Safety, the Mid Iowa Narcotics Enforcement (M.I.N.E), the Des Moines Police Department, The Polk County Sheriff's Office, the Iowa Department of Human Services, the County Attorney's Office and Blank Children's Hospital to address drug-endangered children's issues. These agencies will work in a collaborative effort to facilitate a coordinated response to promote the health and safety of children found in laboratories or places where illicit drugs are kept or sold. The primary goal of the DEC Team is to provide the appropriate diagnosis and treatment of children who have been exposed to illicit drugs, and to prosecute all individuals responsible for endangering children. Appropriate diagnosis and early treatment are imperative so that the psychosocial and physical needs of these children are effectively addressed.

### **DEC Team Response**

A Law Enforcement lab response team will respond when a lab is located. They will assist in the investigation, collection of evidence, and preparation of the case for prosecution, including relevant reporting of all issues regarding child endangerment.

The law enforcement lab team will process the methamphetamine or other drug lab pursuant to the guidelines established by the Iowa Department of Public Safety and the Iowa Department of Public Health. All photographs and reports

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written will be maintained by the local law enforcement agency or Task Force. All photographs and reports that pertain to child endangerment filings will be shared through the local county attorney's office with DHS to support allegations of child endangerment in the CINA hearings.

Upon notification, DHS will respond within one hour if children are present. For reasons of imminent danger, law enforcement will remove the children from the caretaker's custody. DHS will accept custody of the children and will transport them to Blank Children's Hospital where the medical protocol will be put in place. The initial complete medical assessment should be completed within 12 hours.

If not admitted to the hospital for care and treatment, the children will be placed either in shelter care, foster care or relative care. Information necessary to file a Child In Need of Assistance petition and arrange for a Post Removal Conference will be provided to the County Attorney's Office. If parents provide names of relatives who might be available to care for their children in lieu of foster care, background checks on all household members should be completed. Potential caretakers shall be willing to apply for TXIX and FIP if necessary to support the child(ren) financially. Potential caretakers shall agree to abide by the terms of the safety plan/case plan regarding ongoing care, supervision, parental contact.

If necessary, Polk County EMS will respond to illicit drug laboratories where children are present. Lab certified law enforcement personnel will evaluate the child for any acute symptoms of chemical exposure and determine whether the child needs decontamination and/or emergency medical care. Any indicated decontamination of the child will occur at the scene. Task Force and DHS personnel will place the child into clean clothing at the scene, and the contaminated clothing of the child will be retained as evidence. The paramedics will make all reports available for the preparation for trial.

As indicated by evidence gathered in each individual case, the Polk County Attorney's Office will review, file, and prosecute each DEC case in Polk County. The County Attorney's office will convene periodic meetings of the DEC team. When appropriate, the County Attorney's Office will hold training for law enforcement, DHS, and other agencies.

### **Interviewing of Victims, Witnesses and Parents**

Task Force agents and the investigating officers will conduct preliminary interviews of witnesses and parents at the scene whenever possible. While at the scene every effort should be made to have medical releases signed by the parents or caregivers to assist in obtaining medical histories and to assist in the medical exam. However, in every case where the child is removed from the custodian's care, a pre-placement physical exam including testing indicated in the medical protocols is required. Consent for such physicals is implicit in removal cases and will be included in all ex-parte orders otherwise.

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### **Procedure for Examination and Testing of Victims**

The child(ren) should be transported to Blank Children's Hospital, either to the Emergency Department (ED) or to the Regional Child Protection Center (RCPC) for a medical exam. All appropriate laboratory tests will be performed on the child as medically indicated at that time. Physical assessments can be used for foster care purposes.

Triage by an RN from the RCPC is available at 205-4654 at all times. The results of any assessments and tests done in the ED will be faxed to the RCPC for follow up evaluation, monitoring, and tracking purposes.

### **Assignment of Cases**

If allegations of an active lab are received, DHS will contact law enforcement immediately. Law enforcement will coordinate with DHS when their assistance is needed.

### **DEC Team Meetings**

All members of the DEC team shall meet quarterly to discuss DEC policies and protocols and to review the progress of the DEC team. At that time there should also be a case review in order to successfully assess and improve upon the response by the DEC team. In addition, a subcommittee of members shall meet monthly to review recent Polk County DEC cases to be sure that proper protocols were followed, that the needs of the child(ren) have been identified and met, and that the appropriate follow up is arranged.