

	<p><b>State of Tennessee Department of Children's Services</b></p> <p><b>Protocol for Child Death and Near-Death Response and Review</b></p>
	<p><b>Supplemental to DCS Policy: <a href="#">20.28, Child Death and Near-Death Response and Review</a></b></p>

**A. Rapid Response and Notification of Child Death/Preliminary Near-Death**

1. Immediately upon learning of a child's death while in the custody of the Department of Children's Services (DCS), DCS employees will contact the Child Abuse Hotline.
  - a) This is done regardless of a known allegation of abuse/neglect to ensure proper legislative notifications occur.
2. For referrals involving child death, the Child Abuse Hotline (CAH) staff place the Abuse Death allegation into the Electronic Record System.
3. Upon receiving a referral regarding the death or preliminary near-death of a child, CAH staff will immediately inform the Notification Team by via e-mail. The Notification Team includes the following members:
  - a) Commissioner.
  - b) Deputy and Assistant Commissioners.
  - c) Communications Director.
  - d) Appropriate Regional Operations and Statewide Services Executive Directors General Counsel.
  - e) Legislative Liaison.
  - f) Director of Health and Education.
  - g) Director of Nursing.
  - h) DCS Registered Nurses.
  - j) Safety Analysts.
  - k) SIU Child Death/Near-Death Response Team Leader (TL).
  - l) The regionally assigned Case Manager (CM).
  - m) Appropriate Regional Operations and/or Statewide Services Director for the county involved.
  - n) Director of Child Mortality Reporting.

**Original Effective Date: 04/29/2026**

**Current Effective Date: 04/29/2026**

**Supersedes: None**

**Supplemental to: 20.28**

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4. Additional steps for children/youth in DCS custody are listed below:
  - a) The Family Service Worker (FSW)/Juvenile Service Worker (JSW) or supervisor ensure notification to the TL, Team Coordinator, and the Office of Quality Compliance (OQC) Executive Director, SIU Child Death/Near-Death Response Team TL, and the respective regional Child Death/Near-Death Response Team CM, or designee, with details of the child death/near-death immediately.
  - b) The OQC Executive Director and/or their designee will call the Commissioner within one (1) hour to communicate information about the custodial child death/near-death.
  - c) The custodial child/youth's family will be notified, as per the procedures and guidelines outlined in the [\*\*Protocol for Death of a Child in Department of Children's Services Custody/Guardianship\*\*](#).
5. Additional steps for children/youth in Youth Development Center (YDC) placements are as follows:
  - a) The Superintendent of the YDC immediately provides telephone notification of the death/near-death, including verification of the death and any other pertinent information regarding the child/youth, to the Assistant Commissioner, or designee, of the region in which the death/near-death occurred.
  - b) The Assistant Commissioner, or designee, of the region in which the death/near-death occurred will notify the Commissioner by telephone within one (1) hour of learning about the death/near-death.

**B. Investigation and Documentation of Child Death/Preliminary Near-Death**

1. Cases will be assigned to the SIU Child Death/Near-Death Response Team CM in the respective region.
  - a) Refer to DCS policy [\*\*14.6, Child Protective Services Case Tasks and Responsibilities\*\*](#) and the **Child Death/Near Death** category for required and recommended CPS tasks.
2. The SIU Child Death/Near-Death Response Team TLr conducts a case search in the Electronic Record System to determine if there are any duplicate cases and will contact the Field Customer Care Representative (FCCR) in the region to remedy any data clean up that needs to occur on the case.

**Original Effective Date: 04/29/2026**

**Current Effective Date: 04/29/2026**

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3. If an urgent issue is identified on a case, the case supervisor notifies the Team Coordinator and, if necessary, the appropriate Regional Operations and/or Statewide Services Director and Regional Safety Analyst.
4. All case documentation on child death or preliminary near-death cases are recorded in the Electronic Record System as soon as possible but no later than the process described in DCS policy [\*\*31.14, Case Documentation Requirements\*\*](#).
5. Additional procedures for children/youth in DCS custody are listed below.
  - a) The DCS Special Investigations Unit (SIU) investigates these incidents when there is an allegation of abuse or neglect and/or when the child/youth's cause of death is sudden and unexpected.
  - b) The CPS Worker assigned the case will record the case closure in the Electronic Record System in the Court section "Legal Status" by entering a "Termination Date" and "Termination Reason" as "Death of Child".
  - c) DCS staff working the case will refer to DCS policy [\*\*20.57, End of Life Decisions for Children in Custody/Guardianship\*\*](#) and the [\*\*Protocol for Death of a Child/Youth in Department of Children's Services Custody Guardianship\*\*](#).
  - d) Within four (4) hours of notification of the death of a custodial child/youth, the SIU Child Death/Near-Death Response Team TL, documents in the Electronic Record System they have received notification of the child death and have verified the date of death has been properly entered into the Electronic Record System.
6. Additional steps for children/youth in Youth Development Center (YDC) placements are as follows:
  - a) Within one (1) hour of notification of the death of a youth, the Deputy Commissioner of Juvenile Justice, or designee, documents in the Electronic Record System that they have received notification of the youth death and have verified the date of death has been properly entered into the Electronic Record.
  - b) The DCS Special Investigations Unit (SIU) investigates these incidents when there is an allegation of abuse or neglect and/or when the child/youth's cause of death is sudden and unexpected.

### **C. Data and Reporting**

1. Upon notification of a child death or near-death, the Director of Child Mortality Reporting updates a "master log" of all child death/near death data.
  - a) The "master log" contains the following data elements:

**Original Effective Date: 04/29/2026**

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**Supersedes: None**

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- ◆ Date of death.
  - ◆ Electronic Record System Identification number.
  - ◆ Child's name.
  - ◆ Date of birth.
  - ◆ Date of referral.
  - ◆ Date Investigation opened.
  - ◆ Sex.
  - ◆ Region/County.
  - ◆ History of DCS involvement.
  - ◆ Legislative Notice tracking.
  - ◆ Cause and Manner of death.
  - ◆ Investigation Classification.
2. For children/youth that require the Director of Child Mortality Reporting to provide a report to legislators within 10 (ten) business days of the death or near-death, the identification of the appropriate legislators representing the child/youth are determined by the home address of the child/youth.
- a) If the child/youth was not a resident of Tennessee prior to being placed in the custody of the Department, the legislators representing the child/youth is determined by the address of the residence or facility in which the child/youth was located at the time of death or near-death.

**D. Child Death/Preliminary Near-Death Support for DCS Staff and Debriefing**

Support for Staff

1. Within 48 (forty-eight) hours of assigning the death or near-death case, the appropriate Regional Operations and/or Statewide Services Director holds a debriefing with all relevant DCS staff to support emotional well-being and offer Emotional Wellbeing Solutions services, as needed, to the group or individuals.
  - a) The SIU Child Death/Near-Death Response Team and/or Director of Child Mortality Reporting will schedule these 48 (forty-eight) hour debriefings.
  - b) The Human Resources Director, or designee, contacts the Department's Emotional Wellbeing Solutions provider and coordinates on-site Critical Incident Debriefing.

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2. DCS staff may obtain information for accessing supportive services at [Emotional Wellbeing Solutions](#).

### Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Process

1. Review the [Protocol for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing](#) for information on this process.

### **Forms:**

None

### **Collateral Documents:**

[\*\*\*Protocol for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing\*\*\*](#)

[\*\*\*20.57, End of Life Decisions for Children in Custody/Guardianship\*\*\*](#)

[\*\*\*Protocol for Death of a Child in Department of Children's Services Custody/Guardianship\*\*\*](#)

[\*\*\*14.6, Child Protective Services Case Tasks and Responsibilities\*\*\*](#)

[\*\*\*31.14, Case Documentation Requirements\*\*\*](#)

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