

October 16, 2017

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for the excellent care that you provide every day to the children and families of Tennessee. As state agencies, we very much value your partnership in assuring that all children get a safe and healthy start.

In 2013, Tennessee became the first state in the nation to make NAS a reportable condition—this requires providers and hospitals to report cases of NAS to the Tennessee Department of Health for surveillance purposes. These data have been incredibly helpful in understanding the magnitude of the NAS epidemic and also in directing program and policy efforts to reduce the burden of NAS in Tennessee. Thank you for your continued help in capturing this important data.

In 2016, Congress enacted the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016. Recognizing the needs of infants born and affected from prenatal drug exposure, the Act requires states to require health care providers involved in the delivery or care of such infants to notify the child protective services agency of the occurrence of the conditions in such infants. This allows the child protection authorities to address the health and substance use disorder treatment needs of the infant and the affected family. In Tennessee, such referrals should be made to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS). **This includes children that are born affected by maternal use or misuse of addictive substances (whether legal (e.g., prescribed drugs) or illegal) and would include cases of NAS or other conditions resulting from prenatal substance exposure, such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.**

When you report a case of NAS to the Tennessee Department of Health, this is different than reporting suspected abuse or neglect to DCS. **If you suspect abuse or neglect in a case, even if you already made a reportable condition report to public health, you should also make a report to DCS.**

You can make a report by calling the Child Abuse Hotline at 877-237-0004, or you can also call 877-237-0026, which is a hotline specifically devoted to medical and legal professionals. You can also report online via: <https://apps.tn.gov/carat/>. Please remember that when you make a report, you do not have to investigate the case to verify whether abuse or neglect is occurring—that is the job of DCS. You only need to have suspicion of abuse or neglect in order to make a referral.

DCS staff may also reach out to you for medical records and treatment records related to the care of infants impacted by substance abuse. These requests support DCS staff in making plans for the safe care of infants and guiding decisions related to the child's disposition and permanency planning. Your cooperation in providing these records helps us to make the best decisions, with the best information and in the best interest of the child and family.

We are very grateful for the work that you do every day on behalf of children and families in Tennessee. We are proud to partner with you in this effort. Please do not hesitate to let us know if there are ways that we can be helpful to you.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Hommrich
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Children's Services



John J. Dreyzehner, MD MPH FACOEM
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Health