

Signs of Physical Abuse in Babies

Babies can't tell us when something is wrong, but there are signs to watch for that may mean your baby needs medical care.

What is physical abuse?

Physical abuse means a baby is hurt on purpose by someone caring for them. Babies under 6 months of age are much more likely to experience serious physical abuse than older children.

Abuse can be caused by anyone who cares for a baby, including childcare providers, relatives, people that the family knows and trusts, or the baby's own parent or caregiver. Examples of physical abuse of an infant include kicking, shaking, pinching, biting, punching, slapping, hitting, choking, and burning.

Accidents happen and sometimes babies get hurt even when caregivers are careful. The most important step is to get medical care right away.

Possible warning signs of physical abuse

Some injuries in babies can be a warning sign for a medical issue or possible physical abuse. These are injuries that are not common in infants under 6 months old since they cannot move around on their own and injure themselves. If you notice any of the signs below, get medical care right away.

Bruises or skin injuries

Any injuries on a baby who is not yet moving are concerning.

Watch for:

- Bruises anywhere on the body.
- Scratches, bite marks, or unusual marks on the skin.
- Mouth or facial injuries, such as bleeding from the mouth, nose, or eyes.

These should always be checked by a medical provider.



Abusive head trauma

Abusive head trauma (sometimes called Shaken Baby Syndrome) happens when a baby is shaken hard. This can cause brain damage, serious injury, or death.

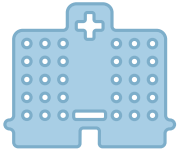
Signs to watch for:

- Not responding to touch, sounds, or voices.
- Pale or unusual skin color.
- Trouble staying awake.
- Seizures.
- Vomiting (more forceful than spit up).
- Crying much more than usual and can't be comforted.
- Eating less than usual.

Get medical help right away if your baby has any of these signs.



What to do if you are concerned



Seek medical care right away

Call 9-1-1 if it is an emergency. Otherwise, go to urgent care or the emergency room.



Write down what you notice

When you saw the injury, who was caring for your baby, and any changes in behavior. Take photos if you can.

How to report suspected physical abuse

If you think your baby may be abused, you can report it.

- Contact the county or Tribal social services agency where your baby lives. A list can be found on the [Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families Directory of County and Tribal Child Protection Agencies](https://dcyf.mn.gov/directory-county-and-tribal-child-protection-agencies) (<https://dcyf.mn.gov/directory-county-and-tribal-child-protection-agencies>) [webpage](https://dcyf.mn.gov/directory-county-and-tribal-child-protection-agencies).
- To report suspected abuse in childcare centers, contact the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Intake Line: 651-539-8222 or email dcyf.licensingintake@state.mn.us.

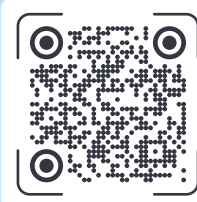
Resources

There are resources available for parents and caregivers who need additional support.

- [Community Resource Centers](https://dcyf.mn.gov/community-resource-centers) (<https://dcyf.mn.gov/community-resource-centers>) provide culturally responsive, relationship-based support and service navigation for expecting and parenting families and youth.
- [Help Me Connect](https://helpmeconnect.web.health.state.mn.us/HelpMeConnect) (<https://helpmeconnect.web.health.state.mn.us/HelpMeConnect>) is a resource directory for expecting and parenting families with young children, and those working with them.
- [TEN-4-FACESp](https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/I7V1cjt1Hkyhzs4KS1mysw.pdf) (<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/I7V1cjt1Hkyhzs4KS1mysw.pdf>) is a reliable medical screening tool. Doctors use it to spot worrying bruises on a baby's body, face, or mouth that could be signs of physical abuse.

Contact

Minnesota Department of Health
Child and Family Health Division
625 Robert Street N, St. Paul, MN 55164
651-201-3650 | health.mch@state.mn.us



**More
information**

To obtain this information in a different format, call 651-201-3650

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Scan the QR code or visit:

www.health.state.mn.us/people/womeninfants/infantabuse.html