

Unborn child reports

Information for Child Protection practitioners

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* will allow anyone in the community to contact Child Protection or Child FIRST before the birth of a child, if they have serious concerns for the wellbeing of a child after their birth. For example, a hospital may contact Child Protection, indicating that an expectant mother has a serious drug problem that is likely to place a newborn infant at risk.

Child Protection or a family service can then provide assistance and support to the pregnant woman to reduce the likelihood that her child, when born, will be at risk of harm. Protective and family service practitioners will be encouraged to work in partnership with maternity services and other professionals to:

- encourage and support an expectant mother's participation in antenatal and primary health care
- support expectant mothers to access high quality care during birth
- provide information about nutrition and self-care during pregnancy.

Workers may also help expectant mothers to prepare for the birth of their child – for example by providing them with essential baby goods.

Strong partnerships between professionals prior to the birth of a child will also enable effective planning about supports and interventions that may be required to ensure a child's safety and healthy development after they are born.

In order to support effective assessment, planning and support to expectant mothers, the following practice standards will apply:

- The High Risk Infant program must be consulted in all unborn child reports received by Child Protection.
- A community-based child protection worker should be consulted if significant risk or needs issues are identified in a referral about an unborn child.
- The community-based worker will then arrange for the High Risk Infant program to be involved in future planning and support.
- Both Child First and community-based Child Protection workers will need to record the details of any consultation about an unborn referral.
- Where significant risk and needs issues arise, a case conference should be arranged. This case conference should involve relevant professionals, including maternity services. Where the mother consents, parents/extended family should be invited to participate in the case conference – unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Reports about an unborn child will not be subject to key performance indicators regarding timeframes for Child Protection involvement with a family. Assistance should be provided to mothers/families of unborn children for as long as required, leading up to the birth of the child.

Following the birth of the child, Child Protection can make applications to the Children's Court if they consider that a child is in need of protection. No court applications can be made prior to the birth of the child.

More information:

For more information, fact sheets and supporting documents, see the every child every chance website:
www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance

Supporting documents:

- Practice standards will be detailed in the updated Child Protection manual.

Related fact sheets:

- Role of consultation at intake