



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT RELEASES NATIONAL GUIDE FOR SEXUAL ABUSE MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS OF CHILDREN

WASHINGTON— The Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) today released the *National Protocol for Sexual Abuse Medical Forensic Examinations – Pediatric* (Pediatric SAFE Protocol). The Pediatric SAFE Protocol is a guide for health care providers who conduct sexual abuse medical forensic examinations of prepubescent children, and other professionals and agencies/facilities involved in coordinating with health care providers to facilitate medical forensic care in cases of sexual abuse of juveniles.

The Pediatric SAFE Protocol recommendations are organized into two broad sections. The first section focuses on guiding communities in laying a foundation of approaches and practices that support successful response during the exam process to disclosures or suspicions of sexual abuse in prepubescent children. The second section focuses on the various components of the sexual abuse medical forensic exam process.

According to the Pediatric SAFE Protocol, the primary goals of a pediatric sexual abuse medical forensic examination are threefold: address the health care needs of prepubescent children who disclose sexual abuse or for whom sexual abuse is suspected; promote their healing; and gather forensic evidence for potential use within the criminal justice and/or child protection systems.

The protocol builds upon existing state, federal, tribal and national and international resources, as well as research related to community response to child sexual abuse and pediatric sexual abuse medical forensic examinations, and is intended to supplement, not supplant, existing protocols.

The Pediatric SAFE Protocol was created to supplement the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations, Adults/Adolescents* (SAFE Protocol). First released in 2004, it is a voluntary best practices guide for criminal justice and health care professionals responding to adult and adolescent sexual assault victims. In 2013, the Attorney General released a second edition of the SAFE Protocol that reflected the latest scientific advancements as well as the changes in practice since 2004. In August, 2013, OVW issued a companion

document to the SAFE Protocol, which was focused on assisting correctional facilities to implement the SAFE Protocol. Following the release of the second edition, OVW partnered with the International Association of Forensic Nurses to develop the Pediatric SAFE Protocol to address the unique challenges of sexual abuse medical forensic examinations of prepubescent children.

OVW, headed by Principal Deputy Director Bea Hanson, provides leadership in developing the nation's capacity to reduce violence against women through the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and subsequent legislation. Created in 1995, OVW administers financial and technical assistance to communities across the country that are developing programs, policies and practices aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. More information is available at www.justice.gov/ovw. Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason for the Office of Justice Programs and Principal Deputy Director Hanson also authored a [blog post](#) today on the importance of the Pediatric SAFE Protocol.

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