

Every person within a community has a moral, ethical and often legal responsibility to ensure the safety of the children within that community. It is the caring and conscientiousness of friends, neighbors, family members and who alert the Children’s Administration to the plight of children who may be in harm’s way.

Referrals made to CPS are *allegations* of abuse or neglect. Every report of suspected abuse or neglect is assessed to determine whether or not it meets the legal definition of abuse.

If a referral does meet legal criteria, the level of severity is assessed and a prescribed “response time” is followed. Those allegations determined to be at “high” or “moderate” risk require a face-to-face social worker visit within 10 days of the report. Children who are determined to be in “imminent danger” of harm must be seen by a social worker within 24 hours.

In Calendar Year 2003, concerned community members initiated nearly 79,000 referrals to DSHS alleging the abuse or neglect of a child or group of children. Of those allegations, over 38,200 met the legal definition of abuse or neglect. The rate of accepted referrals showed a notable decrease over previous year and while the causative factors are not certain, the decrease may be attributed to enhanced training and more thorough screening of CPS referrals.

More than 4,200 families who were referred but whose children were assessed as being at “low risk of harm” were redirected to the Alternative Response System (ARS). ARS is a statewide service provided by contracted agencies to low-risk families in the least intrusive manner to improve family stability, prevent re-referrals to CPS for abuse and neglect, and improve the safety of children. The service is time-limited and voluntary.

The measures reported in this section document the frequency of repeated harm to children and track the administration’s efforts to reduce or prevent the recurrence of child maltreatment.

Although most data presented in this report is based on the fiscal year, some safety measures are based on a calendar year breakout in order to show the historical trend.

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Child Protective Services Referrals*



* Based upon calendar year rather than fiscal year calculations. Centralized Intake was implemented in December 2002 and did not impact the number of accepted referrals in calendar year 2002.