

01 Background

There are lots of things to consider when bringing a child into care, and that their safety is the primary concern. Although, cared for children have many of the same health issues as their peers, the extent of these is often greater because of their past experiences. Therefore, the sooner these health issues can be assessed, the sooner any unmet health needs can start to be addressed.

Statutory guidance indicates that all children entering care have an initial health assessment (IHA) which is made available for the first cared for children review which should be within 20 working days. For the Sefton children in care (CiC) health team to arrange the IHA, it has been agreed that they should be notified within 2 working days of the child entering care. The Sefton CiC health team are notified into their work tray on LCS/Liquid Logic at the point when the social worker requests their manager approve the child's BLA status. For a doctor to fully assess a child's health needs they must have detailed information about why the child has entered care and information about the child, parents and any brothers or sisters.

07 What next?

Compliance against IHA timescales will continue to be monitored and reported through to Corporate Parenting Panel.

Joint IHA audits between Service Managers and 'health' will continue to be completed.

The progress of IHAs for individual children will continue to be tracked and escalations made to Service Managers when avoidable barriers to achieving timely IHAs have been identified.

What the CiC health teams are doing

The CiC health team will try and offer IHA appointments which are suitable for the child/carer/family, within 11 days of the child entering care. The date of the planned IHA is usually inputted into the health assessment drop-down box on LCS/Liquid Logic. Social Workers are notified of the planned appointment, requesting they support attendance, where possible. The team will also share any subsequent changes to appointments. Reminder calls then attempted 2 days before to support IHA attendance. Alder Hey have produced a short video to explain the IHA to children. <https://alderhey.nhs.uk/services/children-care>

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For further information contact the Mersey Care CiC health team at lac.sefton@nhs.net or on 0151 295 9690.

If further support is required contact Helen Case Designated Nurse Children in Care NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (Sefton Place) at sefton.cic@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk (Email address updated March 2024 HC)

Partnership Challenges

Recent audit/monitoring of IHAs has identified that the challenges to the partnership achieving timely IHAs include:

- Too many "late" (red and amber) notifications to the CiC health team of children entering care
 - Green = received within 2 working days
 - Amber = received 3-4 working days
 - Red = received 5+ working days
- Consent to the IHA not being obtained and shared with the CiC health team on a proactive basis resulting in IHAs having to be postponed
- Children "was not brought" to their IHA appointments
- IHA appointments being cancelled at short notice by carers or social workers
- Limited information being made available by social workers as to why children have been brought into care, resulting in the CiC health teams having to postpone appointments whilst they "chase" information from social workers
- A significant increase on the demand for IHA services across the country, coupled with the resource/capacity issues that many public services are experiencing

What can carers do?

Prioritise the child attending their IHA appointment. However, if this is not possible let the CiC health team know as soon as possible so that the appointment can be allocated to another child and so the appointments is not 'lost/wasted'. Let the CiC health team know as soon as possible if a child (usually a teenager) is refusing to attend the IHA. It may also be useful to access the Alder Hey Child's Hospital webpages with the child and watch the short video together (see section 6).

What can Social Workers do?

Ensure that authorisation for the child entering care is completed and sent to the team managers within 1 working day.

Obtain consent for the IHA at the same time as parents/young person signs section 20 arrangements; or within 3 working days of a Care Order being granted (Part A BAAF document).

Share detailed information about why the child has entered care with the CiC health team (Part A BAAF document).

Support the child to attend the IHA appointment. There is a partnership agreement that social workers will attend, or will arrange for family support workers to attend, the IHA with all children living at home with parents. Liaise with the CiC health team as soon as there is any likelihood that an IHA appointment will not be attended or if a child ceases to be in care before the IHA appointment is attended.

Notify the CiC health team within 1 working day of any changes in carer/the child's home address so that IHA appointments can be redirected.



What can IROs do?

IROs can check that carers have brought the child to IHA appointments. IROs can check that the child's IHA has been completed within 20 working days of entering care.

IROs can read the child's IHA before the cared for child review meeting.

IROs can check that all actions identified within the health action plan of the IHA have been completed/are being completed.

IROs can use dispute resolution processes when IHAs have not been completed or if identified health actions in a child's health action plan are not progressed.

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