

## Medical assessment of siblings and household contacts in suspected physical abuse

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Version 2	Created		To be reviewed	

### National guidance

National guidance about the medical assessment of siblings/household contacts of a child being seen for a child protection medical is limited.

- The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) Child Protection companion<sup>1</sup> states: ‘Other children in the family should always be considered in relation to their need for assessment.’ And, in chapter 9, it states that skeletal survey should be considered in a twin of an infant (or in a sibling aged less than two years) with signs of physical abuse. Consider screening siblings if there is any suspicion of abuse.’
- The General Medical Council (GMC) guidance on child protection medicals<sup>2</sup> states: ‘The examination must be in the child’s best interest, it must be necessary and appropriate. It needs to be clear what it is designed to achieve and how it will alter the proposed course of action.’

The Royal College of Radiology revised guidelines 2018<sup>3</sup> state that:

When serious injury\* is identified in a child due to suspected physical abuse:

- Any multiple birth siblings of an index case less than 2 years should have the same recommended radiological imaging as the index case.
- Age-appropriate radiological imaging should be considered in all siblings and children less than 2 years old living in the same household or in the household of the alleged or suspected perpetrators on a case-by-case basis.

\*Serious injury is defined as fractures, burns >5% total body surface area, traumatic brain injury, intra-abdominal trauma, intrathoracic trauma, injuries requiring paediatric intensive care unit admission or death. Clinical judgement should always be exercised particularly with fractures.

<sup>1</sup> RCPCH (2013). *Child Protection Companion* Available from: <https://childprotection.rcpch.ac.uk/child-protection-companion/> [Accessed 22/06/2023] Chapters regularly updated online.

<sup>2</sup> GMC Online. Protecting Children and Young People: child protection examinations. Available from: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/protecting-children-and-young-people/child-protection-examinations> [Accessed 22/06/2023]

<sup>3</sup> Society and College of Radiographers and the Royal College of Radiologists. The radiological investigation of suspected physical abuse in children. Revised first edition. London Society and College of Radiographers and the Royal College of Radiologists; 2018. Available from: [https://www.rcr.ac.uk/system/files/publication/field\\_publication\\_files/bfcr174\\_suspected\\_physical\\_abuse.pdf](https://www.rcr.ac.uk/system/files/publication/field_publication_files/bfcr174_suspected_physical_abuse.pdf) [Accessed 22/06/2023]

## Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS) guidance

When a child needs medical examination for suspected physical abuse careful enquiry should include details of all siblings and household contacts (household contacts defined as household contacts of the index child and any other household or regular child contacts of any alleged or suspected perpetrators).

In general, the younger the sibling or household contact, the lower the threshold for examination and possible investigation. Older children with no identified concerns may not need to be examined. If there is suspicion of physical abuse in a child, they should be seen for medical examination.

### Where an index child has been medically examined and physical abuse is suspected:

- When serious injury\* is identified, medical examination should be carried out in
  - Any multiple birth siblings of an index case less than 2 years (with the same recommended radiological imaging as the index case, whether or not they have visible injuries).
  - Siblings and household contacts who are aged under two years, or who may not be able to disclose abuse (Age-appropriate radiological imaging should be considered on a case-by-case basis.).
- For other injuries, medical examination should be carried out in
  - Any multiple birth siblings of an index case less than 2 years (and the same radiological imaging as the index case should be considered on a case-by-case basis).
  - Siblings and household contacts who are non-mobile, and where the possibility of physical abuse cannot be excluded (radiological imaging considered on a case-by-case basis).
  - Siblings and household contacts who are aged under two years, or who may not be able to disclose abuse, if they are: at the same risk as the index child and/or have not been seen undressed by an impartial adult.#
- In general, there should be a low threshold to medically examine siblings and household contacts who are aged under two years, or who may not be able to disclose abuse.
- Medical examination of other siblings and household contacts should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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\* Serious injury is defined as fractures, burns >5% total body surface area, traumatic brain injury, intra-abdominal trauma, intrathoracic trauma, injuries requiring paediatric intensive care unit admission or death. Clinical judgement to exercised with fractures.

# Children should not be undressed by a professional whose role would not ordinarily involve this. Foster carers receive safeguarding training and are considered as part of the professional team around a child. They should only comment on the presence or absence of injuries if they are confident to do so. If they are not confident to state there are no injuries, this needs to be taken into account at the strategy discussion