Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Division of Safety and Permanence Child Welfare Licensing Memo Series 2026-27L

Supersedes DCF Child Welfare Licensing Memo Series 2026-27L

July 6, 2026

To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator
DCF Area Administrators
Child Placing Agency Directors
Child Welfare Agency Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Group Home Providers
Tribal Social Service/Indian Child Welfare Directors
Child Placing Agencies
Residential Care Center Providers
Shelter Care Providers
Tribal Chairpersons

From: John Elliott
Administrator

Re: Serious Incident Reporting Requirements

PURPOSE

This memo clarifies guidance provided in Child Welfare Licensing Memo Series 2026-22L pertaining to serious incident reporting (SIR) requirements. For group home providers, certain reporting requirements have been changed pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code. ch. DCF 57, effective June 1, 2026.

BACKGROUND

All licensees are required to report serious incidents pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 52, ch. 54, ch. 57, and ch. 59, and Wis. Stat. ch. 48, as applicable.

Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 has since been revised to modify certain reporting requirements for group homes. This memo also updates guidance regarding reporting requirements for other licensed providers.

INFORMATION SUMMARY

SIR Requirements

The process for submitting SIRs remains unchanged; however, certain reportable incidents and reporting requirements have been revised.

All serious incidents must be submitted to the department using the SIR form, DCF-F-CFS-2146-E, via the web-based application available at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwlicensing/sirsubmittal.

The SIR form has been updated to reflect changes to reportable incident requirements. The form is digitally fillable, must be completed as fully as possible at the time of submission, and electronic signatures are accepted.

Reporting timeframes:

- Serious incidents must be reported within 48 hours of the occurrence for residential care centers and child placing agencies, 72 hours for group home providers, and as soon as possible for shelter care facilities.
- Deaths must be reported within 24 hours, unless otherwise specified by applicable administrative rule.
- Timeframes are calculated in accordance with Wis. Stat. § 990.001(4)(a), excluding the first day and including the last, and do not include Sundays or state legal holidays (from midnight to midnight). Deadlines falling on a Saturday extend to the next day that is not a Sunday or a state legal holiday.

Scope of reporting requirements:

- Residential care centers pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 52, must comply with reporting requirements established by rule and any additional reporting required by the department.
- Child placing agencies pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 54 must report incidents as required under applicable administrative rules.
- Group homes pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57, must report the specific serious incidents identified in Wis. Admin. Code s. DCF 57.09, including medication administration errors that result in an adverse reaction.
- Shelter care facilities pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 59, must report incidents as required under applicable administrative rules.

The attachment provides additional guidance on reportable incidents. Incidents that do not require submission of an SIR must still be documented in the child's record. Placing agencies and the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian should be notified of incidents, as appropriate.

If there is uncertainty about whether an incident must be reported, providers should consult with their licensor.

Individuals who are mandated reporters pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 48.981(2)(a) shall report suspected child abuse or neglect to a child welfare agency or law enforcement as required.

For more information or questions, please contact the following:

CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT: Licensing Section
Bureau of Permanence and Out-of-Home Care
Division of Safety and Permanence
DCFCWLR@wisconsin.gov

MEMO WEB SITE: https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy

ATTACHMENTS: Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57
Serious Incident Report Requirements: Reportable Incidents

Serious Incident Reporting (SIR) Requirements: Reportable Incidents

Residential Care Centers (DCF 52):
Required Reporting (within 48 hours unless otherwise specified):

- Death or serious injury of a resident.
  - Must report within 24 hours after the death of a resident when reasonable cause exists to believe that the death was related to the use of a physical restraint or a psychotropic medication or was a suicide.
  - A "serious injury" includes any injuries requiring hospitalization.
- Serious incidents involving law enforcement.
- Reported child abuse or neglect.
- Suicide attempt by a resident.
- Medication errors adversely affecting a resident.
- Relocation of residents.
- A fire that requires the services of the fire department.
- Any use of a restraint resulting in injury or death of a child.
- Use of force to prevent a Type 2 resident from going missing.
- Damage to the premises that affect compliance with administrative rules and endangers resident safety.
- Equipment failure that affects compliance with administrative rule and endangers resident safety.
- Any incident requiring execution of the facility's disaster plan or closure of the facility.
- An outbreak of a serious communicable disease, as defined in Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 145, Appendix A.

Child Placing Agencies (DCF 54):

- Required Reporting (within 48 hours unless otherwise specified):
  - Unusual incidents such as a major fire.
    - A "major fire" is defined as one that requires the services of the fire department.
  - Death or serious injury of a child.
    - "Serious injury" is defined as one which requires the hospitalization of the child.

Group Homes (DCF 57)

- Required Reporting (within 72 hours unless otherwise specified):
  - Suspected or reported child abuse or neglect involving staff, contractors, or volunteers.
  - Incidents involving law enforcement services that occur on group home premises or at location where licensee has primary responsibility for resident's immediate care and supervision.
  - Use of physical restraint on a resident.

- Serious injury or trauma requiring services of medical provider.
- Medication errors adversely affecting a resident.
- Suicide attempt by a resident.
- A case or suspected case of a communicable disease, as defined in Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 145, Appendix A, in the group home.
- Facility damage or equipment failure affecting compliance with administrative rule and endanger a resident's physical safety.
- A fire that requires the services of the fire department.
- Incident or condition that requires relocation of residents or closure of the facility.
- Death of a resident (report within 24 hours).

Shelter Care Facility (DCF 59):

- Required Reporting (report as soon as possible):
  - Death of a child.
  - Serious illness or injury.
  - A fire that requires the services of the fire department.

Clarification and Guidance:

- Child abuse or neglect:
  - Report, when applicable, any suspected or reported abuse or neglect that occurs while the child is under the facility's supervision or that involves a staff member, volunteer, contractor, another resident, a household member (as defined in DCF 56), or an unapproved caregiver.
  - For purposes of "unusual incident" reporting for child placing agencies, abuse or neglect allegations are considered reportable unusual incidents and must be submitted as an SIR.
  - DCF 59 does not specifically require shelter care facilities to report all incidents of abuse or neglect under Wis. Stat. § 48.981 to the department. However, the department encourages facilities to notify the department when they become aware of suspected or reported abuse or neglect involving a child in care.
  - Do not submit an SIR for incidents that occurred before placement, were already reported, did not involve the facility, or do not involve one of these individuals. However, these situations may still need to be reported under mandated reporter laws.
- Suicide attempt:
  - Report, when applicable, a suicide attempt when a child tries to end their life or shows repeated behaviors or statements indicating they want to die (which may or may not include a plan).
  - Do not submit an SIR for self-harm without suicidal intent, such as superficial injuries that do not require medical attention.
- Adverse reactions to medication:
  - An adverse reaction is an unwanted side effect from medication, such as

upset stomach, fever, dry mouth, rash, or drowsiness. Seek emergency care for severe reactions and contact a healthcare provider for milder symptoms as soon as possible.

- When applicable, report any medication error that causes an adverse reaction within SIR requirements (e.g., 72 hours for group homes, 48 hours for RCCs).
- Notify the placing agency and the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian within 24 hours, and document the reaction in the child's record. Group home providers may use the Medication Administration Record – Group Home (DCF-F-CFS2338) to meet documentation requirements.