

**232.79 Custody without court order.**

1. A peace officer or juvenile court officer may take a child into custody, a physician or physician assistant treating a child may keep the child in custody, or a juvenile court officer may authorize a peace officer, physician or physician assistant, or medical security personnel to take a child into custody, without a court order as required under [section 232.78](#) and without the consent of a parent, guardian, or custodian provided that both of the following apply:

a. The child is in a circumstance or condition that presents an imminent danger to the child's life or health.

b. There is not enough time to apply for an order under [section 232.78](#).

2. If a person authorized by [this section](#) removes or retains custody of a child, the person shall:

a. Bring the child immediately to a place designated by the rules of the court for this purpose, unless the person is a physician or physician assistant treating the child and the child is or will presently be admitted to a hospital.

b. Make every reasonable effort to inform the parent, guardian, or custodian of the whereabouts of the child.

c. Make every reasonable effort to place the child with an adult relative or a fictive kin of the child.

d. In accordance with court-established procedures, immediately orally inform the court of the emergency removal and the circumstances surrounding the removal.

e. Within twenty-four hours of orally informing the court of the emergency removal in accordance with paragraph "d", inform the court in writing of the emergency removal and the circumstances surrounding the removal.

3. Any person, agency, or institution acting in good faith in the removal or keeping of a child pursuant to [this section](#), and any employer of or person under the direction of such a person, agency, or institution, shall have immunity from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed as the result of such removal or keeping.

4. a. When the court is informed that there has been an emergency removal or keeping of a child without a court order, the court shall direct the department or the juvenile probation department to make every reasonable effort to communicate immediately with the child's parent or parents or other person legally responsible for the child's care. Upon locating the child's parent or parents or other person legally responsible for the child's care, the department or the juvenile probation department shall, in accordance with court-established procedures, immediately orally inform the court. After orally informing the court, the department or the juvenile probation department shall provide to the court written documentation of the oral information.

b. The court shall authorize the department or the juvenile probation department to cause a child thus removed or kept to be returned if it concludes there is not an imminent risk to the child's life and health in so doing. If the department or the juvenile probation department receives information which could affect the court's decision regarding the child's return, the department or the juvenile probation department, in accordance with court established procedures, shall immediately orally provide the information to the court. After orally providing the information to the court, the department or the juvenile probation department shall provide to the court written documentation of the oral information. If the child is not returned, the department or the juvenile probation department shall cause a petition to be filed within three days after the removal.

c. If deemed appropriate by the court, upon being informed that there has been an emergency removal or keeping of a child without a court order, the court may enter an order in accordance with [section 232.78](#).

5. When there has been an emergency removal or keeping of a child without a court order, a physical assessment of the child by a licensed medical practitioner shall be performed within

twenty-four hours of the emergency removal or keeping of a child, unless the child is returned to the child's home within twenty-four hours of the emergency removal or keeping of a child.

[C79, 81, §232.79]

83 Acts, ch 96, §157, 159; 84 Acts, ch 1279, §10; 89 Acts, ch 230, §15; 90 Acts, ch 1215, §1; 94 Acts, ch 1172, §24; 2001 Acts, ch 135, §14; 2022 Acts, ch 1066, §33, 34; 2022 Acts, ch 1098, §27; 2023 Acts, ch 19, §612; 2025 Acts, ch 86, §27

Referred to in §232.44, 232.79A, 232.95, 232.104, 232B.6

Subsection 5 amended