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Father drops off 9 children under 'haven' law
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Child drop-offs under Nebraska's safe haven law have until now been individual affairs involving individual children.

But Wednesday evening at Creighton University Medical Center, a father dropped off nine children, all his.

The children ranged in age from 1 to 17 years, said Officer Michael Pecha, an Omaha police spokesman.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services was still gathering details late Wednesday and would not comment, department spokeswoman Kathie Osterman said.

She did clarify, however, the process by which children are handled once dropped off:

When a child is left, hospital staffers call local law enforcement. Police in most cases would place a child or children in emergency protective custody.

The county attorney recommends whether a child should remain in state custody or return home, and a judge ultimately decides on placement.

In the week-and-a-half before Wednesday, at least two teens and one preteen had been dropped off at eastern Nebraska hospitals.

The safe haven law was intended to protect unwanted newborns, but Nebraska's law does not set an age limit on children who can be left at hospitals. Many have interpreted that to mean children up to age 19 can be dropped off.

The maximum drop-off age under similar laws in other states is 1 year old. Most limit drop-offs to within 72 hours to one month after birth.

Nebraska was the last U.S. state to adopt a safe haven law. HHS plans a press conference today to discuss recent problems and concerns about the new law.

Lawmakers already are discussing whether the law should be amended in the next session.