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## **L.A. mother charged with murder in bathtub drowning of son**

**Police say the woman admitted she dozed off, leaving the 17-month-old and his 2-year-old brother alone in the bathroom at least 12 minutes. She has pleaded not guilty.**

By Andrew Blankstein

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Shortly after her 17-month-old son drowned in the bathtub of her Westlake home April 1, Nancy Jacinto told Los Angeles police investigators that she had left the bathroom for just seconds and returned to find the boy floating face down in the water.

Jacinto, a 19-year-old mother of three, said she had left to get a towel to dry off Jacob James Gaona and his 2-year-old brother.

But the evidence at the home and results of the autopsy were inconsistent with her account, Los Angeles Police Department detectives said.

Then, as investigators with the LAPD's Juvenile Division were preparing to interview Jacinto, she made a startling admission, Capt. Fabian Lizarraga said.

She said that while she was bathing the children, she "needed to catch her breath. She was stressed out," Lizarraga said. "She dozed off a little bit, and when she woke up, she realized what was going on and went to check on the kids."

Rather than seconds, Jacinto was away from the bathroom at least 12 minutes, police say.

Prosecutors have charged her with child endangerment and murder.

Jacinto has pleaded not guilty.

The LAPD had visited Jacinto's home in January after her 3-year-old daughter went to school with a burn mark on her cheek, Lizarraga said. The girl initially indicated that her mother was responsible, and officers were sent to the home to interview the child.

Police prepared an injury report, Lizarraga said, but there was no evidence that pointed to abuse.

The explanation given to police was that the girl had grabbed a spoon used to stir eggs that were

boiling. According to the interviews, the spoon was still hot when she grabbed it and held it briefly against her face. Her face was burned, but the skin was not broken, the report said.

The case was reviewed, and on March 1, police notified the county Department of Children and Family Services about the incident.

An appointment to visit the residence was made, but police said it was not clear whether social workers had visited the family before Jacob's death.

The coroner's office ruled that the boy died from drowning and that his death was a homicide.

Neither Jacinto nor her attorney could be reached for comment.