

Sexual Assault Forensic Exams

Sexual assault is a traumatic experience that can leave many survivors concerned about what they should do next. There are a number of services and options available to people who have experienced sexual violence, including undergoing a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE). This is to help you better understand how SAFEs work. A SAFE is a medical forensic exam conducted by a trained medical professional, often a forensic nurse examiner. The exam is focused on addressing medical needs and the collection of potential forensic evidence (forensic means it may be used in court or an investigation).

The SAFE includes a detailed head-to-toe physical examination that will be thoroughly explained by the forensic nurse examiner at the hospital. During the exam process you may receive the following:

- Immediate attention given to possible injuries requiring medical care;
- A head-to-toe physical examination which may include photographing of injuries, swabs of the mouth, collection of biological and trace evidence, and a detailed genital examination;
- Sexually transmitted infection prevention treatment including HIV prevention (nPEP) and pregnancy prevention medication;
- Follow-up care referrals and information for local service providers.

The Role of an Advocate

Receiving a sexual assault forensic exam can be stressful, overwhelming, and scary. An advocate is either a staff member or volunteer with your local Rape Crisis Center who is available to support you during this process. Their experience and specialized training allow them to address a wide range of survivors needs before, during, and after a SAFE. Advocates often act as part of a survivor's support network and can assist with the following:

- Processing the trauma you've experienced and providing support;
- Understanding the legal process;
- Providing follow-up services including crisis intervention and on-going counseling;
- Applying for victim compensation.



Your local Rape Crisis Center is:

Heartly House, Inc.

You can contact the 24/7 hotline at:

(301) 662-8800

Advocacy During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic hospitals may not allow advocates to provide in-person hospital accompaniment for health and safety reasons. However, advocates remain available through your local Rape Crisis Center and are carrying out their roles and offering support remotely, often via telephone.

Remember, you have the right to speak to an advocate at any time during the exam. Please do not hesitate to ask the forensic nurse examiner, or any hospital staff, to contact an advocate for assistance.

Resources



For Reporting: If you have been sexually assaulted, you may want to consider reporting the assault to the police. If you are interested in speaking to the police, you can discuss reporting with your advocate or forensic nurse examiner. You can also report by calling 911. Police remain available to take reports of sexual assault and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anonymous Exams: You have the right to receive a SAFE without reporting the assault to law enforcement; this is often referred to as an anonymous exam. You do not have to make a decision about reporting the assault to police before arriving at a hospital or medical care facility for your SAFE. Once you arrive for care, the forensic nurse examiner and advocate can guide you through the anonymous reporting option. If you are not planning to report the assault to the police immediately, it is important that you still receive medical care. Collecting evidence after an assault may also give you more options if you decide to seek prosecution in the future.

For Advocacy Services: Advocacy services are available during the COVID-19 pandemic. To find your local Rape Crisis Center to discuss and obtain services, call 211 or visit MCASA's website at mcasa.org and navigate to Survivor's Seeking Help and then Find a Rape Crisis Center.

For Legal help: The Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI) provides comprehensive legal services for sexual assault survivors. SALI legal advocates and attorneys are available to assist you during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Call SALI at 301-565-2277 or 877-496-SALI for legal help, or visit mcasa.org.**



During the COVID-19 pandemic your safety, health, and well-being remain important.

Community service providers, including the local rape crisis centers, forensic nurse examiners, and law enforcement, remain dedicated to ensuring the safety of each community member.

We are available to support and assist you.