

Frequently Asked Questions After Sexual Assault

If you have been sexually assaulted, you may have some questions about your options.

The Massachusetts Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program and rape crisis centers across the state are here to help.

What is sexual assault?

- Sexual assault is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without consent. Sexual assault happens when a person is forced, coerced, pressured, or manipulated into any unwelcome sexual activity. **Sexual assault is never your fault.**

When and where should I get medical care?

- If possible, it is recommended that you seek medical care in a hospital Emergency Department as soon as you can. The sooner you get there after the assault the more options you may have.
- You have the right to get medical care after a sexual assault without reporting anything to the police. It is recommended that you get medical care - whether or not you plan to report the assault to the police.

What medical care should I get?

- You can choose to receive ANY of the following:
 - A general physical exam to check for injuries and make sure you are okay
 - Medications to help prevent pregnancy (if you are able to become pregnant)
 - Medications to help reduce the risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and HIV
 - Testing for Sexually Transmitted Infections
 - A Forensic Exam with evidence collection. This is a detailed head-to-toe exam looking for any possible injuries or physical evidence that may be found on your body after an assault.
- For adult and adolescent patients, evidence collection can be done up to 5 days (120 hours) after the assault.
- Evidence collection can be done whether or not you decide to report your assault to the police.
- A forensic exam could also include Toxicology testing (urine and/or blood) for substances that you may have taken, or that were given to you without your knowledge/consent, related to your sexual assault.
- *See below for more information about Forensic Exams and Evidence Collection*

Will I have to pay for my medical care?

- The hospital **cannot** bill you directly or charge you a co-pay for your care related to sexual assault.
- If you want, you may choose to use your health insurance – but you are not required to use it for this care.
- If you have concerns about using your insurance, tell the hospital staff, the rape crisis advocate, or your SANE nurse. The costs for your hospital care can be covered by a program called *Victim Compensation* if you have a forensic exam/evidence collection.

What is a MA Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (MA SANE)? And how can they help me?

- A MA SANE is a clinician (nurse, nurse practitioner, nurse midwife, or doctor) who has specialized training from the MA Department of Public Health to provide compassionate sexual assault exams and forensic evidence collection.
- A MA SANE is an independent clinician who works for the Department of Public Health; a MA SANE is not part of the police department and they don't work for law enforcement. They will keep your information confidential. However, if you choose to report your assault, the SANE or the rape crisis advocate can help you do that.

Where can I go to get care from a MA SANE?

- MA SANEs care for patients in many of the hospitals across Massachusetts. In addition, at some hospitals, expert MA SANEs use “telehealth” (video conferencing) equipment to support patients, nurses, and doctors to conduct a sexual assault exam and forensic evidence collection. You can find the SANE or TeleSANE hospital closest to you here: <https://www.mass.gov/ma-sexual-assault-nurse-examiner-sane-program>

What is a Rape Crisis Advocate? And how can they help me?

- A Rape Crisis Advocate (“advocate”) is a person who has been trained to provide support to someone who has been sexually assaulted – no matter how long ago the assault happened.
- An advocate should be called by the hospital whenever a person who has been sexually assaulted comes in for care. The advocate can meet you in the Emergency Department and stay with you while you are there.
- You have the right to have an advocate if you would like, and you can ask to have one called if that has not been offered to you.
- An advocate can help support you while you are at the hospital, including during a forensic exam (if you choose to have an exam). They can also help support anyone who came to the hospital with you.
- They can provide you with information and support moving forward, and be an ongoing support system for you and your family if you choose. They have a 24/7 hotline you can call. All of the services they provide are free of charge.
- They can offer connections to free counseling, legal help, financial assistance, and other support.

More Questions About Forensic Exams and Evidence Collection:

Why might I want to consider getting a forensic exam?

- A forensic exam is done to document and collect evidence that may be on your body as a result of being assaulted. This evidence can be used as part of the investigation.
- You can choose to have evidence collected even if you are not sure that you want to report your assault to the police.

Do I have to report my assault to the police in order to get a forensic exam/evidence collection?

- No - it is up to you to decide whether or not to report to the police.
- You also have the option of reporting to the police *without* receiving medical care or having a forensic exam/evidence collection.

How much control will I have during a forensic exam?

- What is done is up to you. You do not need to complete any parts of the exam you are not comfortable with.
- The SANE will explain every step of the exam, and you can accept or decline any portion at any time. If you begin the exam and need to stop, that is ok.

What should I expect during the evidence collection process?

- The evidence collection process - or evidence “kit” - is a series of steps the MA SANE performs to collect evidence from areas of your body that were involved in your assault. This can include swabbing parts of your body with cotton swabs. If you have physical injuries, photographs may be an optional part of your evidence collection.
- You will be asked questions about the assault so that the SANE can decide which steps of the kit should be done.
- Your SANE and Rape Crisis Advocate will support you through the exam.

What happens to the evidence?

- If you decide to report your assault to the police, your evidence kit is transported to a Crime Laboratory, where it is analyzed.
- If you decide **NOT** to report your assault to the police, your evidence kit is transported to a secure location, but it will **not** be analyzed. It is stored for at least 15 years. If you later decide to report to the police, all of your evidence will be analyzed at that time.
- If you have an evidence kit completed, you will be given information to help you to track the location of your kit - **whether or not** you report your assault to the police.

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