

Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exams

What is a medical forensic exam?

A medical forensic exam is a free medical examination to provide medical treatment and collect evidence up to 5 days after a sexual assault. The exam is completed by a healthcare provider with specialized training called a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE).

What are the benefits of a medical forensic exam?

- To receive medical treatment of any injuries or trauma related to the sexual assault
- To access preventative treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, or obtain emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy
- To preserve evidence and give you time to decide whether you would like to report the crime
- If you decide to report your sexual assault, having a medical forensic exam increases the likelihood of prosecution.
- It's free (insurance will not be billed for the costs of evidence collection)

How should I prepare for a medical forensic exam?

You can receive a medical forensic exam up to 5 days after a sexual assault, but the sooner it's completed, the more evidence may be able to be collected.

If you are able, try to avoid activities that could potentially damage evidence such as, bathing, showering, using the restroom, changing clothes, combing hair, or cleaning up the area. However, you can still receive an exam even if you have done any of these activities.

Place any belongings, including the clothes you were wearing in a paper bag to safely preserve evidence. You may also want to bring a change of clothes with you.

What happens during a sexual assault medical forensic exam?

The sexual assault medical forensic exam is completely voluntary. The nurse will facilitate informed consent to ensure that you understand the full nature and purpose of each procedure and will give you the opportunity to consent to or decline any part of the exam. You can stop, pause, or skip any part of the exam. In general, the steps of the sexual assault medical forensic exam are described below:

- **Immediate medical care** – Addressing any injuries that need immediate attention.
- **Medical Forensic History** – This includes your medical history as well as the assault history. You will be asked to tell the nurse what happened. The questions may seem very personal, but this will guide the nurse's evidence collection during the exam. What you share will be documented and may be discussed in court if you choose to report to law enforcement.
- **Physical Exam, Evidence Collection, & Photography** – Based upon your specific experience, this may include a head-to-toe examination, examination of the genitalia, swabs of body surface areas, collecting clothing and other evidence, providing blood or

urine samples, and potentially taking photos. Keep in mind that these steps are voluntary and you have the right to decline anything you are uncomfortable with.

- **STI and pregnancy risk evaluation and care** – Based on the description of the sexual assault, the nurse will discuss potential risks for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, and/or pregnancy, and options for preventative care and treatment.
- **Discharge & Follow Up** – At the end of the exam you will be provided information about follow up medical care and available resources.

The exam can be emotional, especially after experiencing a sexual trauma. Most healthcare facilities offer Medical Advocates to provide support and assist you through the process. You may also choose to bring a support person with you to the exam as well.

What is a Sexual Assault Kit?

The Sexual Assault Kit, frequently called a “rape kit,” contains all of the forensic evidence that was collected during the exam. You may choose to release the kit to law enforcement or it will be stored at the medical facility for at least one year.

Do I have to report to the police?

Survivors are NOT required to report the crime to law enforcement in order to receive a medical forensic exam and/or for evidence to be collected. If you choose not to release your kit to the police at the time of the exam, it will be securely stored in case you decide to release it to the police at a later date.

What does it mean to release my kit?

When you sign the form to release your kit to law enforcement you will be initiating a criminal investigation. Once the kit is released to law enforcement, the medical facility cannot get it back. Law enforcement will contact you for a statement and the contents of the kit will undergo laboratory analysis and forensic testing. Releasing the kit may increase the likelihood that the case will result in prosecution. Once your kit has been released you can track the status and location of your kit using the Track-Kit code that was provided to you at the time of the exam.

Where do I go to receive a medical forensic exam?

Most hospitals offer medical forensic exams, and some community-based programs offer this service as well. Below is the information for the two programs offering medical forensic exams in the greater Lansing area. To find a local SANE program, call the RAINN hotline 1-800-656-HOPE(4673).

MSU Sexual Assault Healthcare Program

Open to any person 18 and older, walk-in 24/7 or call ahead 517-353-2700
 Student Services Building 2nd Floor
 556 E. Circle Dr. East Lansing, MI 48824

Sparrow Hospital Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program

Open to children and adults, walk-in to ER 24/7, 517-364-1000
 1215 E. Michigan Ave. Lansing, MI 48912