

Medical Forensic Exams

A medical-forensic exam is a comprehensive medical exam performed by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner/Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SANE/SAFE) who is a specially trained Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner, Physician's Assistant or Physician with advanced educational and clinical preparation.

The SANE/SAFE will perform the following during the medical-forensic exam:

- **Obtain a detailed history of the assault or abuse**
- **Provide a detailed head-to-toe examination**
- **Perform a detailed genital examination, which may include an examination with a speculum**
- **Collect biological or trace evidence from your body**

The medical-forensic care you receive from the SANE is provided at no cost to you; however there may be costs related to your medical care provided by the emergency department staff including labs, tests and medications to prevent Pregnancy, Sexual Transmitted Infections (STI's), including HIV. The SARS Advocate or SANE can arrange for you to speak with emergency department staff if you have questions about billing.

Evidence collected by the SANE may help with the identification and prosecution of the perpetrator of the crime. Without this evidence, it is often more difficult to identify and/or prosecute the person who committed the sexual assault.

If you would like to request a medical-forensic examination:

1. Contact The Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault Crisis Line at 1-800-400-1001 or (520) 327-1171
2. Report the assault to hospital emergency room staff. All hospital personnel are required by law to automatically report to police if a sexual assault victim/survivor comes to the emergency room for treatment resulting from a sexual assault. However, victims/survivors do not have to talk with law enforcement if they do not want to prosecute. We do recommend that you still receive immediate medical care and treatment.
3. Hospital staff should dispatch a SARS Advocate to provide support to you during your visit at the hospital. Be sure to ask hospital staff to contact a SARS Advocate.
4. Try not to eat, drink, wash your hands, shower, use the restroom, or change your clothes until you speak with a law enforcement. Evidence may be on your body. It is vital to collect this evidence as soon as possible.

What you need to know about evidence:

1. Over time, evidence is lost, begins to degrade, or becomes contaminated and is difficult or impossible to process. After a certain point, typically around **120 hours (5 days after an assault)**, most experts believe that little or no useful evidence will be collected during a medical-forensic exam.
2. Even when a medical-forensic exam is performed immediately after a sexual assault, sometimes there simply isn't a lot of evidence that can be collected.

Facts to consider when deciding on a medical-forensic exam

1. You can still receive medical-care without having a medical-forensic exam.
 - a. Hospital staff can provide medications, including medications to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STI) and Plan B to prevent pregnancy.
 - b. A physician can treat you for any injuries you have as a result of the assault
2. You can still receive advocacy provided by a specially trained Sexual Assault Resource Service (SARS) Advocate.
3. **You can make a report to law enforcement at any time; however your kit may be destroyed within one (1) year of receiving the medical-forensic exam.**
4. The biological evidence in your kit may be analyzed, even if you do not cooperate with law enforcement.
5. Law enforcement may choose to contact you, but you have the right to decide when you make a report.

If you do not want a medical-forensic exam:

1. You can still call the Center Against Sexual Assault's crisis line for other options at 1-800-400-1001 or (520) 327-1171
2. Call your physician or a local medical clinic (listed in the phone book). Doctors or other medical personnel are mandated to report to law enforcement. However, victims/survivors do not have to talk with law enforcement if they do not want to prosecute. We do recommend that you still receive immediate medical care and treatment.