

Have You Been Sexually Assaulted?

Information For Survivors of Sexual Assault

Ninth Edition

ARE YOU FEELING:

Ashamed?

Depressed

Anxious?

Angry?

REMEMBER:

Nobody has the right to sexually assault you.

It is not your fault.

You did not do anything to deserve this.

A crime has been committed against you.

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Information For Survivors of Sexual Assault

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Most of the information in this booklet is applicable to all survivors of sexual assault. All persons regardless of age, sexual orientation, self identified gender, and/or non gendered are sexually assaulted.

Sexual assault covers all forms of forced sexual contact. For further information, please see the legal section of this booklet, pages 13-14.

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WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT AT THE HOSPITAL

1. To receive full information about your treatment options and the care provided to you;
2. To have the option of having a friend, family member, or support worker present for support throughout your hospital care;
3. To decide if you would like medical care and/or the treatment offered;
4. To receive considerate and respectful care by doctors and nurses;
5. To have the option of a complete medical examination whether or not you decide to have forensic samples collected;
6. To decide if you would like to have forensic samples collected;
7. To decide if you would like to report the sexual assault to the police;
8. To possibly be charged a hospital emergency room fee if you do not have valid B.C. Medical coverage.

HOSPITAL PROCEDURES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

Triage:

- If you wish, ask a friend, relative or sexual assault support worker to go to the hospital with you.
- You will be asked to provide basic information (name, address and medical insurance number if you have one) to the person at the Emergency Admitting Area. Depending on the hospital, this person may be a clerk or a nurse. You may want a friend or family member to do this for you.
- A nurse will ask you some questions about your health.
- You may have to wait (hopefully in a private room) before seeing the doctor/nurse examiner. This delay is due to the fact that many hospital emergency rooms are very busy.

- Any interview with hospital personnel or the police about the sexual assault should be carried out in a private area.
- After speaking to a nurse and after the options for care are explained, you will be asked to sign a consent for a sexual assault examination, if that's what you want.
- You have the right to delete any portion of the consent form which you do not agree to. This will not affect the quality of care you receive.

You have the right to a complete medical examination whether or not you decide to have forensic samples collected.

- You will be asked if you consent to forensic samples being collected. Forensic samples can consist of things like the documentation of injuries, the collection of swabs, as well as an examination of areas related to the sexual assault.
- With consent, your clothes may be collected as forensic samples. They will not be returned once they are taken by police.
- You may choose whether you would like your regular doctor to be notified of this visit. If you do not want your doctor contacted, please tell the doctor and/or nurse at the hospital.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION

- In the examining room you may be asked to undress and put on a hospital gown. You can request to stay in your clothes if you feel more comfortable.
- A support person may be present during any part of your hospital care if you choose.
- If you are having forensic samples taken, your clothes may be collected, placed in paper bags, and kept by police for some time as they are considered evidence. If this is the case, you can:
 - have a friend or sexual assault support worker bring a change of clothing to the hospital for you, or the hospital might provide you with clothes.
- The doctor/nurse examiner will begin the examination by taking a medical history. This ensures that you will receive

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

STIs are infections caused by germs usually passed on by sexual contact.

Some types of STIs for which you should be treated are:

Gonorrhea

- Gonorrhea bacteria can grow inside the throat, bladder opening, cervix (womb opening), and anus.
- A swab can be taken from any of these places to test for gonorrhea. However, it may take several days after exposure before gonorrhea can be detected by a test.
- Antibiotics taken at the time of the examination can treat and prevent gonorrhea.

Chlamydia

- Chlamydia occurs in the same places as gonorrhea.
- Tests will not show it for a week or more after contact.
- Antibiotics taken at the time of the examination can treat and prevent chlamydia.

Syphilis

- Syphilis bacteria can grow anywhere sexual contact has occurred.
- The first sign of syphilis may be a painless sore which can be easily overlooked and may not appear for up to 30 days.
- The best way to test for syphilis is to take a blood test one month and three months after the sexual assault. The blood test shows if your body is reacting to syphilis germs.
- Treatment and prevention of syphilis may be covered by antibiotics for gonorrhea and/or chlamydia but testing is recommended at 1 and 3 months after the assault.

Herpes

- Herpes has a 2 to 15 day incubation period.
- You may feel feverish, have headaches, pains in your muscles and general malaise.
- Lesions like cold sores may appear in the genital area.
- Herpes is diagnosed from a swab of these lesions, or from blood tests. There is treatment for herpes symptoms, but you have to initiate treatment within 3 days of developing genital sores.

**PATIENT'S OWN
RECORD OF MEDICATIONS
AND RECOMMENDED
FOLLOW UP TESTS**

PATIENT'S OWN RECORD OF MEDICATIONS AND RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP TESTS

Examination Date: _____

Attending Doctor / Nurse Examiner: _____

Our Office Telephone: _____

Treatment of:

Medication Used:

Pregnancy: _____

Gonorrhea: _____

Chlamydia: _____

Hepatitis B: _____

Nausea: _____

Other: _____

Follow-up Resources

Recommended Follow-up Tests:

Pregnancy test: We recommend you get a urine pregnancy test 10 days to 4 weeks after the sexual assault.

Gonorrhea and Chlamydia test: We recommend STI testing after the sexual assault if you have any genital discharge or/and pain. For Women - STI testing is recommended if you have any of the above symptoms or are pregnant or having any vaginal or pelvic pain.

Syphilis (blood) test: We recommend a Syphilis blood test 1 month and 3 months after the sexual assault.

HIV (blood) test: We recommend an HIV blood test 1 and 3 months after the sexual assault.

Hepatitis B (blood) test: We recommend a Hepatitis B blood test 1 and 3 months after the sexual assault.

Other:

Hepatitis B Vaccine

- in one month _____
- in six months _____

YOUR REACTIONS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

- It is common to have a range of emotions and feelings after a traumatic experience. Being sexually assaulted is a traumatic experience.
- Each individual responds to and deals with sexual assault in different ways. You may have feelings of anxiety, self-blame, depression, anger, shame, confusion, denial, sadness, or numbness.
- You may not want to think about what happened at all or you may not be able to think about anything else. Pay attention to all your feelings, and take care of yourself.
- These feelings can occur singly or all at once. You might express these feelings by being tense, by crying or by talking, or you may try to hide your feelings and appear calm or withdrawn.
- Sexual Assault Survivors may experience all of these feelings. Most survivors have some of them.
- After being sexually assaulted, you may find your lifestyle disrupted. You may wish to move or change jobs, and your social activities may be affected. Some survivors are afraid to be alone, others are afraid to go out or to be in groups.
- If you think you may have been drugged and/or sexually assaulted, you may not know exactly what happened to you. You may have memory loss and not know for sure if you were sexually assaulted. Not knowing what happened can leave you feeling confused, powerless, humiliated, betrayed and afraid.
- You may also have minor health problems due to the stress you are experiencing. Your sleeping habits may change and you may have disturbing dreams. Your appetite may also be affected, resulting in weight loss or weight gain.
- **It is important for you, your family, and friends to understand that all of your feelings are normal, acceptable, and real. These are all common responses to the sexual assault.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You may think that you should have been able to foresee or stop the assault. It is important to remind yourself that it was not your fault. No one deserves or asks to be sexually assaulted. You can't always know who or what situations are going to turn out to be dangerous. You made the best choices possible at that time, in that moment.

- You may wish to express your feelings to a trusted friend, a support worker, or a counsellor. Talking may help you to clear up confusing feelings and to sort out ways to move forward with your life. You may wish to talk about your feelings and concerns immediately after being sexually assaulted or you may need to wait and talk about this experience later.
- You have been through a very traumatic experience and you need to take care of yourself. Give yourself time to heal. Try to find activities or places where you feel safe and comfortable
- Explore ways to express your feelings and pay attention to what you are feeling. A counsellor may help you with this. Writing about your feelings may help if you have trouble talking about them. You can keep this private or share it with someone you trust.
- Your friends and family may be upset and angry. It is not your responsibility to make them feel better. Encourage them to find someone to talk to about their reactions.
- Sometimes memories of the sexual assault do go away and then come up again. This will lessen as time goes on and as you heal. You are a survivor and you are not alone.
- If you were drugged, you may be coping with memory loss. This can be extremely difficult. Sometimes the memories return, other times they do not. Expressing your feelings may still be helpful even if you don't remember what may have happened to you.
- Many people who have been sexually assaulted say that it feels like they have no control over what happens in their lives now. It is important during this time in your life to make decisions and choices you feel comfortable with.

- Communicate your own acceptance by being natural and letting them know you are willing to listen.
- Showing affection is important; it shows you still care. If you have been relating intimately, it may be best to use non-sexual forms of touching and wait until the person indicates they are comfortable with sexual relations.
- It is important not to blame the survivor for the crime committed against them. Sexual assaults are meant to humiliate and degrade the person and are an act of aggression. Whether they fought or cooperated with the attacker, the survivor made the safest choice possible at the time.
- Do continue to live and talk with the survivor the way you always have. Don't try to avoid the subject. Encourage the expression of their feelings, but respect their right to privacy. Providing a caring environment in which they feel free to express their concerns around the assault will help facilitate the healing process.

THE LAW RELATING TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

In 1983 major changes were made to the law related to sexual violence. The words 'rape' and 'indecent assault' were removed and a series of new offences called 'sexual assault' were created.

The offences now cover all forms of unwanted sexual contact, from forced sexual touching to forced intercourse.

If you decide to report the sexual assault to the police, they will take a report from you and conduct an investigation. If you have had forensic samples collected, the police will need them and they will ask for your consent to collect them from where they are stored. The police will pass on the investigation information to Crown Counsel. The Crown Counsel is a lawyer that will prosecute the case on behalf of society. They are not your lawyer. **It is the Crown Counsel who decides if and what charges are to be laid.** If charges are to be laid, Crown Counsel will be appointed to the case, and s/he will prosecute the case in court. You will be called as a witness if the case goes to court. Victim Services can help you prepare to go to court. Please call VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808 to find out about victim services in our area.

Before the case proceeds to court you will be interviewed by the Crown Counsel. You may also be asked to testify as a witness at a Preliminary Hearing and later, at the trial.

If you do not wish to report to police, that is your right. You can always choose to report the sexual assault at a later date. There is no time limit on reporting a sexual assault. Some people decide to file anonymous and unofficial reports called "Third Party Reports." A victim service worker may be able to assist you in doing this and give you further details about third party reporting. If you are interested in third party reporting, please call VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808 to find a community based victim service program near you.

If you would like more information on these procedures, or would like someone to go with you when you report to police, speak with Crown Counsel, or need to go to court, contact the nearest sexual assault centre or Community-Based Victim Assistance program. To find a program near you, please call VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808.

CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CVAP)

If you have been sexually assaulted you may be able to apply for benefits under the Crime Victim Assistance Program administered by the Ministry of Justice. This program was previously called Criminal Injuries Compensation and was administered under the Workers Compensation Board.

CVAP may cover things such as counselling fees, prescription drug expenses, medical and/or dental expenses, lost earning capacity, and clothing that may have been damaged as a result of the crime.

If you would like more information about this program or to find the nearest victim service program to you, please contact:

VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808.

WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

Be aware that:

1. Children are usually abused by people they know and trust.
2. Often sexual assaults committed against children do not involve an open attack or physical injury. Adults use their position of authority to convince children to give in to their sexual demands, and often tell children to keep it a secret or they (the abuser) will get in trouble.
3. Children very seldom lie about such a serious matter.
4. Not all children are able to tell parents directly that they have been sexually abused. Changes in behaviour, reluctance to be with a certain person or to go to a certain place may be signals that something has happened.

What to do immediately:

1. Go with the child to a place where you can talk without being overheard. Ask the child to tell you what happened in her own words. Listen carefully and remain calm.
2. Tell the child that telling you was the right thing to do, and that you are very sorry this happened.
3. Tell the child that she is not responsible for what happened.
4. The child may need to have a medical examination; however, it is not necessary to treat it as an emergency unless the assault has taken place within the last 48 hours. Contact your regular physician or go to the nearest Hospital Emergency Department.
5. Sexual abuse of children must be reported to the Ministry of Child and Family Development. You can also contact a Sexual Assault Centre for information and referrals. VictimLINK can be reached at 1-800-568-0808.

If there is no sexual assault crisis centre near you, other places you may want to contact are:

- VictimLINK - Toll Free 1-800-563-0808
(24 hour provincial referral line)
- Your local women's centre
- Your local Community-Based Victim Assistance or Stopping the Violence Counselling Program
- Sexual Assault Service
BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre ☐
604-875-☐
- Your local Emergency Department

To order more booklets contact:

Sexual Assault Service
4500 Oak Street
Vancouver, BC
V6H 3N1

Phone: 604-875-2183

Notes:

Notes:

