

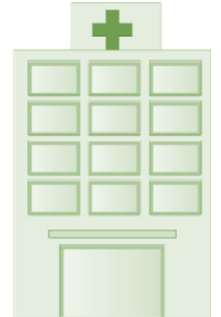


Medical Treatment & Evidence Collection for Adult and Adolescent Survivors of Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence

What are medical forensic exams and why are they important?

Medical forensic examinations help survivors of violent crimes like sexual assault and domestic violence. Specially trained Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNEs) at designated hospitals in most counties in Maryland conduct these exams. Medical forensic exams are important because they can provide:

1. **Medical attention** - essential medical care provided to survivors, such as treatment of injuries and distribution of medication. Often survivors of crime need medical care even if they do not want to document evidence or report the crime to law enforcement.
2. **Evidence collection** - gathering and documenting possible evidence on a person's body from crimes involving assault (like sexual assault, domestic violence, or strangulation). Many survivors may want to have a record of evidence of the crime for possible legal action.



When can I receive a medical forensic exam?

It's important to receive medical attention as soon as possible after experiencing physical or sexual violence, even if you don't have cuts and bruises. In addition, the sooner you seek an exam, the more likely it is that evidence will be found. Since evidence may be lost or washed away over time, survivors of sexual assault should try to not eat, drink, shower, wash, or urinate after an assault, if possible.

Many forensic programs now also offer other medical forensic exams for domestic violence survivors who have been strangled (or "choked"); these patients may need to follow some of the same precautions suggested for sexual assault exams. **However, even if you have done any of these things already, you may still be able to have an FNE look for evidence of sexual or domestic assault.**

In Maryland, survivors of sexual assault may receive a forensic exam up to 15 days post-assault. Survivors should seek a forensic exam as soon as possible after an assault to take advantage of all eligible services.

Do I have to talk to the police to get a forensic exam?

Medical forensic exams for sexual assault can be done with or without involving law enforcement officers. Anonymous Sexual Assault Forensic Exams are done without law enforcement involvement at the time of the exam, giving survivors the option of having evidence collected directly after an assault, while also allowing them time to decide later whether they will make a report and open an investigation. As of October 1, 2023, all Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK), including anonymous SAEKs, will be stored for 75 years.

Some jurisdictions may offer anonymous exams for domestic violence and strangulation. Other programs offer forensic medical exams for domestic violence only if the police are already involved. Survivors may need to check to see which forensic options for domestic assault are available in the area where they are seeking care.



Who pays for medical forensic examinations?

Medical forensic examination costs may vary based on the type of assault. **Not all exams are completely free to survivors.**

In Maryland, survivors do not have to pay for Sexual Assault Forensic Exams or any of the related medical or hospital care if the exam is conducted up to 15 days after a sexual assault. No insurance will be billed. The State covers the costs.

Please note: If survivors decide to seek *only* medical treatment that is not a part of a medical forensic exam, the State will not cover these costs, and insurance may be billed.

Medical forensic exams for survivors of other crimes such as domestic violence and strangulation are not regularly covered by State funds unless the crimes were part of a sexual assault incident. Treatment and evidence collection in these cases are included in the SAFE. For those who have not been sexually assaulted, many hospitals Forensic Nurse Examiner programs have grants that cover the FNE costs for domestic violence strangulation survivors, but other services (medical treatment, labs, Emergency Department visit, etc.) may not be included. Survivors can apply their health insurance for these services if they are covered, but they may be billed for any deductibles, copay costs, etc. The hospital or an advocate may help you find financial assistance if needed.

Where can I get a medical forensic exam and what happens?

- **Step 1: Find the closest hospital with a forensic program.**
- **Step 2:** Go to that hospital's Emergency Department and ask for a medical forensic exam. In most cases, these services are available 24/7.
 - If you report the incident to law enforcement first, they may take you to the hospital for a medical forensic exam.
 - You can also decide to report at the hospital or seek an anonymous exam without reporting to law enforcement. Please see the resources section at the end of the fact sheet for guidance on finding the nearest medical forensic exam program.
- **Step 3:** A doctor or another medical professional will check you medically and treat you if needed.
- **Step 4:** A Forensic Nurse Examiner will provide the medical forensic examination. During the exam, the FNE may collect swabs or take photographs, and you may be asked to answer questions about the assault and your medical and sexual history. This may be uncomfortable, but it is important to answer honestly to receive the best treatment possible.

The hospital may connect you with a victim advocate to provide support during the exam and to offer you follow-up services. If the program does not offer an advocate, you can ask the FNE for help locating support services.

Resources for Maryland survivors

- **Medical attention can be very important for a survivor's healing and well-being. Evidence collection can be equally important to finding justice. Talk to an advocate about your needs and options.**
National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- Find your local Rape Crisis Center:
 - Call **211** or visit MCASA's website: mcase.org/survivors/find-a-rape-crisis-center
- For more information on where to get a SAFE:
 - Visit MCASA's website: mcase.org/survivors/getting-medical-attention

