Medical Forensic Exam Brochure

What is a Medical Forensic Exam?

A specially trained doctor, advanced practice provider, or nurse (provider) may conduct a medical forensic exam when a person has been sexually assaulted or abused. A medical forensic exam is a head-to-toe exam to support your health and look for injuries and evidence that may be used in a police investigation and a prosecution. Sexual assault or abuse can include any unwanted touching or fondling under or over the clothing of certain parts of your body; sexual penetration or sexual contact; the transfer of semen onto parts of the body; and sexual acts involving minors.

The medical forensic exam is free. The exam may take anywhere from 2-6 hours, depending on the care you need, and the evidence to be collected. The exam will happen at a hospital or an approved healthcare facility. If available, the hospital or approved healthcare facility will contact a rape crisis counselor to come and speak with you about the exam and your options. The counselor can also stay with and support you through the entire exam. You may also have a person of your choice stay with and support you through the entire exam.

Before the exam starts, discuss with the provider any needs you may have, such as work or childcare concerns. The provider will stop the exam at any time if it causes you mental or emotional distress.

The purpose of the exam is to:

- Check your physical health;
- Support your health and recovery
- Provide medical testing or treatment, if needed
- Collect possible evidence.

What the exam includes:

- Consent and Assent: The provider will need both permission and your agreement before starting the medical forensic exam. Even if someone else says yes, the exam will not happen unless you want it. You can say no or ask to stop at any time.
- Medical History: The provider will ask you questions about what happened during the assault. These questions will help to guide the rest of the exam. You can answer these questions, if needed, a parent, guardian, or someone with you may help give answers.
- Physical Exam: The provider will examine your body from head to toe to check for injuries and possible sources of evidence. This may also involve a detailed exam of the private areas (genital and anal).
- Photography: The provider will ask to take photos or video recordings of your body where you may have an injury, pain, or a possible source of evidence.
- Evidence Collection: The provider will use the Illinois State Police Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit to collect possible evidence from your body. Depending on the information given during the medical history, the provider may collect your clothing and swab your mouth, hair, skin, fingernails, genitalia or anus. The provider will wear a hair restraint, face mask, and gown, and change their gloves often during the exam to help prevent contamination.

- Evidence Tracking System: There is an evidence tracking system to keep you informed on the status of sexual assault evidence collected at the healthcare facility. Prior to leaving the facility, you will receive a K-number and 6-digit PIN. This information can be used to view evidence status in the tracking system. Should you lose or misplace your K-number or 6-digit PIN you can contact the law enforcement agency handling your case and they will provide you with the K-number and 6-digit PIN.
- Checking for Drugs and Alcohol Used During the Assault: The provider will ask if you took drugs or drank alcohol. They will also ask if you felt sick, threw up, blacked out, or had trouble remembering. These questions help check if drugs or alcohol may have been used during the assault. Being honest about what you took or how you felt helps make sure you get the right medical care. Urine collected as part of the medical forensic exam may show drugs or alcohol taken before the assault, but it will not be used against you.
- Medical Treatment: The provider will assess any medical concerns. They will also evaluate you for sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and give you any necessary medications. If appropriate, the provider will evaluate you for risk of pregnancy and make available medications to help prevent pregnancy.
- Discharge and Follow-up: The provider will discuss with you recommended follow-up appointments and testing. You will also receive information regarding financial assistance.

Children Under the Age of 13

A child will receive a head-to-toe exam similar to their regular checkup at the doctor's office. The provider may look at the outside of the child's genital and anal areas to check for injuries and to collect evidence. Nothing will be inserted into a young child's vagina or rectum. It is important to know that most children have normal exams, but this does not mean that a crime did not occur.

Consenting to a Medical Forensic Exam

A person who is able to give consent for a medical forensic exam may do so on their own, including minors. If a minor is unable to give consent for the medical forensic exam, then a parent, guardian, spouse, or healthcare power of attorney may provide consent. If an adult is unable to give consent for the medical forensic exam, a guardian, spouse, or healthcare power of attorney may provide consent.

A parent, guardian, spouse, or healthcare power of attorney cannot override the patient's decision. An exam will not be forced, and a patient will never be held down or medicated to complete the exam. The provider will ask you if it is okay to proceed with each step of the exam. You can stop the exam at any time or skip any part of the exam. You are in control of what happens.

If you consent to an exam, you are not required to speak to law enforcement. However, the hospital must notify law enforcement that a crime occurred.

If the patient is under the age of 18, the hospital is required to report assault or abuse to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). DCFS is required to immediately refer reports of sexual abuse to law enforcement.

If the patient is age 60 or older, or age 18-59 with a disability and cannot report or seek protection for themselves, the hospital is required to report the assault or abuse to the Department of Aging. The Department of Aging may contact law enforcement.

Evidence Collection

A physical exam is important for your health. Choosing to collect evidence is your choice. Evidence collected during an exam may be used in an investigation.

The chance of finding evidence, including blood, semen or saliva, depends on a number of things. These include the type of sexual assault or abuse, if you changed your clothes or showered after the sexual assault, and how much time has passed.

You may not feel ready to have evidence collected right away, and that is your choice. As time passes, it may be less likely that evidence can be found. It is also important to know that not all kits will contain evidence after collection is completed, but that does not mean that a crime did not occur.

Factors to Consider when Deciding Whether to Consent to Evidence Collection

	Evidence collection is encouraged when:	**Evidence collection may still be performed:**
Children less than 13 years of age	The sexual abuse or assault occurred or could have occurred in the past 72 hours.	If indicated by history, evidence can be collected beyond 72 hours. Each case will be evaluated based on the history provided and best practice.
Adolescents and adults equal to or greater than 13 years of age	The sexual abuse or assault occurred in the past 168 hours.	If indicated by history, evidence can be collected beyond 168 hours. Each case will be evaluated based on the history provided and best practice.

Nothing prohibits offering a medical forensic examination outside the above timeframes

Medical Care at a Transfer Facility

If you first go to a transfer facility, some exam options may not be available. Evidence collection kits and the evidence tracking system are not available at transfer facilities. You may or may not be cared for by a specially trained provider and forensic photos may not be taken.

If you choose to stay at the transfer facility, you can still receive medical care and treatment at no cost. You may also receive a voucher for 180 days of follow-up healthcare.

You can ask to speak with a specially trained provider to help you decide whether to transfer to another facility or to answer any questions you may have.

Benefits and Risks of Evidence Collection

- **It won't cost you.** You should not be charged for the exam. If you have private insurance, the hospital may bill your insurance. If you are not the primary person on the insurance and worry about safety or privacy, you can choose not to use your insurance.
- **You have time to decide if you want to report.** It may take some time to decide what to do. Having a medical forensic exam may help preserve evidence if you choose to report later. You have up to 10 years after an assault or until your 28th birthday, whichever is longer, to have the evidence tested.
- **It may increase the likelihood of prosecution.** The importance of certain types of evidence in sexual assault and abuse cases cannot be overstated. It can affect the outcome of a case and can also prevent future crimes from occurring.
- **Your health matters. Sexual assault can affect your physical health.** You may have injuries or trauma related to the assault or abuse that are not immediately visible. During an exam, you may be able to access treatment for these injuries, receive preventative treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, and obtain emergency contraception to help prevent pregnancy.

For more information contact the
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Individuals with hearing or speech disabilities can reach us by using the 7-1-1 relay service.

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Pursuant to 410 ILCS 70/10(c) The Office of the Illinois Attorney General's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, in consultation with qualified medical providers, has created this content.

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