

Information For an Adult Sexual Assault Survivor in Iowa



What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is ANY sexual contact without consent. It may be called a variety of names including rape, incest, molestation, sexual violence, marital rape, date rape or others. Sexual assault can happen to anyone, at anytime, anywhere. **It is not your fault.**

Sexual Assault is a crime. Perpetrators of sexual assault can be anyone- an acquaintance, date, relative, stranger, friend or spouse. Sexual assault is a crime of power, not lust, done to hurt and humiliate another.

The information contained below is generally for victims aged 16 and above, since 16 is the age of consent in the State of Iowa. Law enforcement response and investigations could be different for victims aged 16 or 17.

You Have Options

What to do if you have been sexually assaulted?

Making decisions after a sexual assault is often upsetting, confusing and very overwhelming. In addition to making decisions about who to tell, you may be struggling with your medical and legal decisions. There is not a one-size-fits-all answer, but once you are safe, the most common and best place to start is to go to a local Emergency Room.

Once you have arrived, you will let them know you are there for sexual assault services. They should prioritize finding a room for you. They should then contact a local victim advocate agency and a trained sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE).

A victim advocate is a free and confidential support person for YOU. This person can also explain procedures and options that are available to you. You have a right to have an advocate remain with you at all times during any law enforcement questioning and the entirety of the medical exam, if you so desire. You can ask the person to leave at any time during your exam. **YOU get to decide what is best for YOU!**

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) are registered nurses who have completed specialized education and clinical preparation in the medical forensic care of the patient who has experienced sexual assault or abuse.

Summary of Options

- To have an advocate present
- To have a medical exam
- To get evidence collected (a sexual assault kit)
- To get medications
- To make a police report
- To remain anonymous

You have the right to accept or decline any of these options.

Medical Treatment – What to Expect

Before a SANE can start their process, they will first determine that you are able and willing to consent. They will have you sign consent forms before asking any questions or performing any part of the exam. Giving consent does not mean that you cannot change your mind at any time during the exam, it simply means that you are willingly agreeing to the services the SANE can provide for you. You can also choose to remain anonymous. If you choose that option, any evidence collected will not be tested, it will only be stored by law enforcement. Law enforcement will only send the evidence to the state crime lab if you want to move forward with an investigation, starting with making a report.

Paperwork

A SANE will gather details and ask some personal questions. These questions may include:

- Have you had sexual activity in the last five days?
- Do you know the person who sexually assaulted you?
- Specific questions regarding the incident and genitals (“did the penis go inside the vagina?”).
- Had you been using any drugs or alcohol?
- Are you currently using any birth control?

None of these questions are meant to imply that it is your fault. You are not to blame for this assault. These questions help guide the SANE in their care, exam and evidence collection, as well as document the circumstances.

Sexual Assault Examination

After the paperwork is completed, a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) will begin the evidence collection and medical exam. These can include:

- Asking you to undress and put on a gown. Your clothes might be kept as part of the evidence collection. If you did not bring any clothes with you to wear home, you may call a family member or a friend for additional clothes or tell the nurse and/or advocate of your need for clothing.
- Providing a thorough head to toe exam for injuries. Depending upon your injuries, x-rays or photographs may be taken.
- Completing an internal and external exam. This is done by taking specimens/swabs from various areas of your body including from your fingernails; swabs from the inside your mouth (buccal swab), your vagina for a woman or your penis for a man and the anal area; and swabs from areas of possible foreign DNA. The type of collection that occurs is dependent upon the details of the assault. A speculum is often used by the SANE to aid in obtaining the vaginal specimens. The specimens collected will be put into the sexual assault kit that will be turned over to law enforcement regardless of making a report. They must take custody of the evidence and store the evidence securely if and until you decide you would like to proceed with the investigation.

Sexual Assault Examination (continued)

- Drawing blood, if indicated. If an oral assault took place, it is common to obtain a blood sample by means of a finger prick to obtain your DNA. This is done to determine if the DNA on the other evidence is yours or the perpetrators. This will also be placed into the sexual assault kit.
- Collecting urine, if indicated. Urine can be collected to determine if there was a drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA). This is typically done if you have a period of time that you cannot remember. The number one drug used for DFSA is alcohol. Though the media portrays the use of Rohypnol, also called “roofies” or the “date rape drug,” as common, it is actually very rare to find Rohypnol in the United States. Perpetrators can use a variety of other easily accessible drugs to achieve the same result. Urine may be collected within 24 hours of the assault for best results. It does not go inside the kit and must be refrigerated.
- Taking photographs of the genitalia by means of a colposcope or other imaging system. These photographs are stored securely and can be helpful in documenting injuries otherwise not visible to the naked eye. Any external photographs will be taken by law enforcement (bruises, bite marks, abrasions, etc.).
- Giving and/or prescribing medications to prevent infection for gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomoniasis, pregnancy and HIV. All medications can be given for up to 30 days after the assault with the exception of the HIV prophylaxis, which must be started within week of the assault, depending on the specific provider. The HIV prophylaxis is more effective within the first 72 hours. The effectiveness decreases over the next few days, but it can still be more effective than not taking it at all, depending on your risk factors. The SANE can only prescribe the starting doses of medication for the HIV prophylaxis. You MUST follow up with an infectious disease or other medical provider to get the remainder of the treatment regimen, which is typically about a month. They will do baseline testing and make sure you are healthy enough to continue on the medications. Please note: taking ONLY the first initial doses of the HIV prophylaxis will not provide any effectiveness against HIV. You MUST complete the entire course of treatment.
- Providing referrals to follow up medical providers (STI/HIV testing), support services, and Crime Victim’s Compensation.

Evidence collection (the sexual assault kit) should be done within 5 days (approximately 120 hours) of the assault; however, you can be seen by the team for up to 30 days post assault for all other parts of the medical exam.

Follow-Up Medical Care

Because not all injuries show up right away, do not be surprised if you discover additional bruising over the next day or two. If this happens, call the police officer/detective who is handling your case. They may want to take additional photographs.

You will not receive any testing for sexually transmitted infections (STI) during your sexual assault exam, which is normal. The SANE may advise you to be checked for STIs four to six weeks after the sexual assault exam. The second checkup may involve a blood test and another examination. These results will help you make future health choices.

You can make appointments for these tests with your personal physician, local city or county health department, STI clinic, women's health center, hospital or neighborhood health clinic.



Additional Information about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

It is impossible to tell right away after a sexual assault if you have been infected with any STI. Tests for STI need to be done at a later date to get reliable results. A checkup might be recommended four to six weeks after your sexual assault exam.

Some of the diseases that you may be tested for are chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV (AIDS virus) and syphilis, at a follow-up exam. These diseases may show very few symptoms and blood tests are needed to determine if you have any. Other infections should be tested for only if symptoms develop.



Pregnancy

You might have been given a base line pregnancy test to determine if you were pregnant at the time of the assault. Only one percent of rape survivors become pregnant as a result of the assault. However, if you are concerned about issues related to possible pregnancy, contact your health care provider. A urine pregnancy test may be recommended three weeks after your assault.

You were also screened to see if Emergency Contraception (Plan B or Ella) was safe for you. Emergency Contraception is not 100 percent effective. If you have not had a period within three weeks after your sexual assault exam, call your health care provider. If you do not have a health care provider, you can make an appointment with your local city or county health department, women's health center or neighborhood health clinic. Plan B does not cause an abortion if you are already pregnant, it simply helps prevent pregnancy before it starts by temporarily delaying the release of an egg from the ovary, so there's no egg to meet the sperm.



Who pays for this?

Neither you nor your health insurance should be billed for any costs associated with the sexual assault forensic exam, medications, or any follow-up appointments. In Iowa, it is illegal to bill a person or their insurance for these costs. There may be charges to you for medical injuries, if there are any. You may be eligible for compensation through the Crime Victim Compensation Program, for the additional medical costs, as well as other benefits.

If you are billed for this exam or if you would like more information about crime victim compensation, call the Sexual Assault Examination (SAE) Program of the Iowa Attorney General at 1-800-373-5044 or 515-281-5044. <https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/for-crime-victims/sexual-assault-examination-payment-program>.

A victim advocate can also help with this process.

Help Is Available

SUPPORT SERVICES

Allow you and your family enough time to heal. Don't be afraid to talk with someone about your feelings and experiences, particularly with a counselor or someone trained in issues of sexual assault. They can also help you with medical and legal questions. No one in your family should have to go through this alone. Crisis counseling can make a difference.

Services are available to you free of charge from your local victim advocate agency, including 24-hour hotlines, crisis intervention, support groups and advocacy.

An advocate from a sexual assault advocacy program can:

- Help you understand the topics described in this handout in greater detail.
- Help you understand how your emotional and physical reactions are a normal response.
- Listen to your feelings and concerns.
- Help you understand and weigh your options.
- Explain the legal process to you if you are considering reporting the crime.
- Contact others on your behalf with your permission.
- Sexual assault advocacy programs are legally and ethically required to protect your confidentiality. Your rights to privacy will be explained to you when you seek services.

Resources

Iowa Victim Service Call Center

The Iowa Victim Service Call Center is a statewide resource to victims and survivors of any crime in Iowa. With staff available 24 hours a day and 365 days a year, callers are able to access resources in their specific areas and given the attention they deserve.

(800) 770-1650 or text "IOWAHELP" to 20121
survivorshelpline.org

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Iowa CASA represents 24 victim service programs across the state. The coalition provides a bridge between victim advocates at sexual assault programs, statewide policy makers, and federal responses to sexual harassment, abuse, and assault.

(515) 244-7424
<https://www.iowacasa.org/>

RAINN

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network operates America's only National hotline for survivors – RAINN connects callers to the nearest rape crisis center that can provide emotional support and referral information.

1-800-656-HOPE
<http://www.rainn.org>

Iowa Safe-At-Home

Safe-At-Home is an address confidentiality program that provides participants with a substitute address.

515-725-7233
<https://safeathome.iowa.gov/>

Legal Issues - You Have Choices!



Law enforcement is typically called to the hospital so that they can offer services, just as the SANE and advocate do. The law enforcement agency is jurisdictional, so the responding agency/officer should be from wherever the crime took place. Talking to law enforcement does not mean that you have to make a report, request that charges be filed or prosecute (go to trial). We encourage you to talk with law enforcement so they can explain their role and some possible outcomes, based on your wishes. Law enforcement may ask some of the same questions (as the SANE) as well as additional questions. This information will help them with their investigation. They will want to know the time, date and location of where the assault occurred. Typically, because of the way that trauma works on the brain, the initial report or meeting should be fairly informal, gathering basic facts of the case. A detective should then follow up in a few days to arrange a time to talk more in depth about the details of the case. None of these questions are meant to imply the assault was your fault. They simply want to get the full details of what happened.

Remember you have a right to decide if you talk to law enforcement. If you are not ready or do not wish to make a report, the officer can give you their card, in case you wish to reach out at a later date. It is also your right to have an advocate with you at all times when you talk to the police. The evidence collected will be turned over to law enforcement, regardless of making a report or not.

If you choose to make a report, the officer should give you a business card with the case number and their contact information. Having this enables you to call them if you remember additional information or would like to know the status of your case.

It is completely normal and expected for you to not remember everything about the assault, or to recall details in a random, non-chronological order. It is also completely normal to recall things in the first few days and weeks after the assault. You can write down memories as they come back and pass them onto the detective. It is also normal to never get the memories. Be kind to yourself. You went through something very traumatic, and the brain goes into autopilot and does what it thinks it needs to do to protect you.

In the case of a dependent adult, mandatory reporting regulations still apply, so anonymous reporting would not be an option.

Law Enforcement Investigation

Whether or not the perpetrator is charged with a crime, a law enforcement officer may get in touch with you to schedule a formal interview. The time and place of the interview will depend upon your physical and emotional condition, but it will typically take place at a police department. You will be asked to talk about the assault again. If at any time you feel uncomfortable as to why a certain question is being asked, you have a right to ask why this question is being asked. Remember – you have a right to have a victim advocate with you during the police interview in the hospital and to request this as the investigation progresses.

What Happens to My Evidence in the Sexual Assault Kit?

What You Need To Know

- The kit will only be tested if you decide to report the crime to law enforcement and wish to move forward with an investigation or if it is a mandatory report.
- The kit will only be tested if you provide consent to have it tested.
- The hospital does not perform any tests on the evidence that has been collected.

What if I change my mind about having the kit tested?

- If a report has already been made to law enforcement, contact that agency and tell them that you don't want the kit tested. If the kit has not yet been tested, you can withdraw your permission for it to be tested.
- If you have not made a report yet to law enforcement, contact the agency and tell them that you want to make a report. Explain that you have already had a medical forensic examination and wish to have the kit tested.

When and how will I get the results from my kit?

The DCI Crime Lab will not reach out to you to let you know the testing is complete or with the results from the kit. The DCI will give the results to the investigating police agency, who would typically then contact you to see if and how you would like to proceed, if charging decisions have not already been made. The lab typically completes testing and has results to law enforcement anywhere from 60-90 days.

The State of Iowa has an online survivor portal that is the access point for a survivor to access the status of their kit. The survivor receives the URL and a unique password at the point of collection by the SANE. The password is linked to the kit barcode. At login, they will be prompted to change their password.

The survivor can:

- See the timeline of their kit as it moves through the workflow.
- Subscribe to email or text notifications triggered by changes in their kit's status.
- Access survivor resources.

Caring for Yourself

Common Reactions

Sexual assault can be one of the most painful and upsetting things that can happen in someone's life. You should not be surprised if your emotions bounce back and forth between wanting to run away and wanting to harm the person(s) who hurt you.

Here are some common feelings and reactions that teens and adults have reported:

Wondering "Why me?", disbelief, difficulty sleeping, fear, shame, guilt, anger, betrayal, inability to concentrate, rage, withdrawal, numbness or emptiness, loss of control, panic, nightmares, reluctance to go to school/work, agitation, and you may find yourself constantly thinking about the sexual assault OR refusing to think about the assault.

All of these feelings and reactions are normal. It is important that you have support to help you express and deal with these feelings. Don't be afraid to talk with someone about your feelings and experiences, particularly with someone trained in issues of sexual assault.



Iowa Attorney General's Office

**CRIME VICTIM
ASSISTANCE
DIVISION**

Crime Victim Assistance Division Office of the Attorney General of Iowa

**Lucas State Office Building
321 East 12th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319**

**Phone: 515-281-5044
Toll-Free: 800-373-5044
FAX: 515-281-8199**

**[https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/
for-crime-victims](https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/for-crime-victims)**

Some things you can try (this is not an all-inclusive list):

- Breathe. When we get scared, we stop normal breathing. Try to relax and take deep breaths.
- Honor your experiences. Appreciate yourself and your strength for having survived.
- Be patient with yourself. It takes time to heal feelings and emotions.
- Address immediate concerns, particularly medical and legal issues. Identify all your choices and options.
- Reassure yourself. These feelings are natural. Many people who suffer from a trauma feel this way.
- Find healing helpers. Look for people (therapist, clergy, and friends) who can guide, support and coach your healing. When looking for a therapist, look for someone who has specialized training in working with victims of trauma. EMDR is a great form of therapy for trauma.
- Go to a support group for survivors. Survivors are wonderful allies. It is very powerful to share your healing journey with others who understand what you are going through. Contact your local victim advocate agency for a support group nearest you.
- Educate yourself. Read books or contact your local victim advocate agency to get information about the common myths and misconceptions surrounding sexual assault.
- Be aware of people and places that make you feel unsafe. Seek help in creating a safety plan that addresses your needs and concerns.