

Accessing Medical Care After an Assault



A RESOURCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Sexual assault affects many people. A common way to get support after an assault is by accessing medical care. This resource includes some important reminders for young people when/if they seek medical care after an assault, or support a friend through the process.

BEING A MINOR

If a minor goes to the hospital after an assault, the hospital staff will legally have to report the assault to the police or Child Protective Services (CPS). However, minors have the right to choose how much they cooperate with police (meaning, if a report is made against a young person's wishes, they do not have to give the police any information if they do not want to).

As of July 1st, 2024, people 13 years old or older do not need parental consent to seek medical care after an assault. However, a report to CPS or police is mandated for those under the age of 18, so parents may be notified by these agencies.

SEXUAL ASSAULT FORENSIC EXAMS

If a sexual assault occurred in the last 5 days, a sexual assault forensic exam (more commonly known as a "rape kit") may be appropriate. Sexual assault forensic exams are physical examinations to collect evidence from someone's body or clothes after an assault. The exam may also be used to assess for injuries or risk of infection. A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) performs the exam and will not do anything that the patient does not want to do. A SANE will also not push the patient to do anything specific and will only provide a list of options. Crime Victim's Compensation, a program that helps victims with costs related to crime injuries, will pay for every part of the exam. Cost should not be a barrier in receiving this service.

Harborview has SANEs who work specifically with children and teens in 3 medical centers in King County. The medical centers include:

- Harborview
- Seattle Children's Medical Center
- Valley Medical Center (for teens 15 years old and older)

Here are some benefits of getting the exam:

Pregnancy Prevention

To prevent pregnancy, a survivor may be given Plan B, an emergency contraception that helps prevent pregnancy before it starts. Plan B has to be taken within 5 days to be effective. Plan B is also not as effective for people over 175 pounds, so it may not be a viable option for everyone.

Ella is another emergency contraception that prevents pregnancy. It's more effective than other morning-after pills (like Plan B), but a prescription is needed to get it. Ella may be a better option for those in larger bodies.

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Prevention

To prevent STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis or pelvic inflammatory disease, the survivor needs to take antibiotics as soon as possible after the assault. To prevent HIV, the survivor needs to take antiviral medication within 72 hours of the assault.

Most STIs are 100% treatable; however, a select few are permanent. Going to the hospital as soon as possible after an assault is the best way to prevent and/or treat STIs.

It's important to note that STIs are common and often have no symptoms. If someone tests positive for an STI due to being sexually assaulted, it is not their fault.

Advocacy Support

Hospitals often have advocacy support available. A trained professional can be there to help a survivor make a report to the police or walk the survivor through their options. At any point during their appointment, survivors can ask for a social worker to answer questions about the medical process and help advocate for their medical needs.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Experiencing sexual assault can be very traumatic. Counseling is another option for survivors. It can be helpful for a survivor to talk to a trained professional about what they're feeling. Counseling is available for adults, children, and family members of survivors.

HELPFUL REMINDERS

Sexual assault forensic exams cannot always answer if a survivor has been drugged or sexually assaulted. Oftentimes after an assault, there is no injury to the body. This is completely normal. Just because there is no injury does not mean the assault did not happen.

Some survivors of sexual assault seek medical support, and some do not. Survivors should make whatever decision that feels right to them.