

## NOTES

# **Have You Been Sexually Assaulted?**

## **Information For Survivors of Sexual Assault**

**Sixth Edition**

Most of the information in this booklet is applicable to female, male, and trans survivors of sexual assault. Because the majority of survivors are female, the term 'she' will be used throughout the booklet.

Sexual assault covers all forms of forced sexual contact. For further information, please see the legal section of this booklet, page 20.

# NOTES

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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 and Health Centre  
604-875-3225

**To order more booklets contact:**

**Sexual Assault Service  
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## **WHAT YOU CAN REASONABLY 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; and if you would like to stay at the hospital;
4. To decide if you would like to report the sexual assault to the police;
5. To decide if you would like to have forensic samples collected;
6. To have the option of a complete medical examination whether or not you decide to have forensic samples collected;
7. To receive considerate and respectful care by doctors and nurses;
8. To receive continuing care and treatment for any future physical and emotional health problems related to this event;
9. To possibly be charged a hospital emergency room fee if you do not have valid B.C. Medical coverage.

If you would like more information on these procedures, or would like someone to go with you to interviews with the police, Crown Counsel and/or 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 Public Safety and Solicitor General. This program was previously called Criminal Injuries Compensation and was administered under the Workers Compensation Board. A report needs to be made to the police regarding the crime for an application to be processed. In exceptional circumstances a report to a health care professional, a counsellor, a social worker, or other agency may be accepted.

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.**

- Do continue to live and talk the way you always have. Don't try to avoid the subject. Encourage the expression of her feelings, but respect her right to privacy. Providing a caring environment in which she feels free to express her 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 interference, from forced sexual touching to what is commonly called 'rape with extreme violence.'

If you decide to report the sexual assault to the police, they will take the information and conduct an investigation. Then they give the 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 argue the case in court. You will be called as a witness if the case goes to court.

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 women 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.

## HOSPITAL PROCEDURES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

### Triage:

- \* If you wish, ask a friend, relative or sexual assault support worker to go to 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 room.
- \* After speaking to a nurse and after the examination is explained, you will be asked to sign a consent for a sexual assault examination.
- \* 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 a 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.

- \* Your clothes may be collected as forensic samples, and 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 will be appropriately marked, placed in paper bags, and kept by legal authorities for some time as they are considered legal evidence. If this is the case, you can:
  - have a friend or sexual assault worker bring a change of clothing to the hospital for you.
  - 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 complete and proper medical attention. S/he will ask you many questions, including:
  - time of your last period (if relevant)
  - your method of birth control (if relevant)
  - information about the assault that is relevant for the medical examination; time and place of assault; if any foreign objects were used; if so, what?, where placed?, etc.

survivor may experience many confusing emotions themselves. These feelings may include disbelief, anger or guilt. It is important that you get the understanding and support you need from someone other than the survivor, perhaps a friend or sexual assault counsellor.

The survivor of sexual assault may feel powerless and fear physical injury or death. The fears may linger or recur in feelings of mistrust. When the shock of what actually has happened wears off, confusing feelings may follow. She may feel humiliated, guilty, embarrassed or angry. Support her anger. It is important to understand that anger is a common emotion for someone who has been sexually assaulted.

She will be experiencing a wide range of emotions. To help you to deal with these feelings there are a few basics to keep in mind.

- Try and remember a situation where you felt afraid and all alone. This may help you have a better understanding of how she is feeling.
- Try not to overprotect her. It is important for her to regain control of her life.
- Don't ask a lot of probing questions or focus on the sexual aspect of the crime. Sexual assault is an act of violence and coercion.
- Do ask her about what concerns her most (i.e. fear for her personal safety).
- Communicate your own acceptance of her by being natural and letting her know you are willing to listen.
- Showing affection is important; it shows you still care for her. If you have been relating intimately, it may be best to use non-sexual forms of touching and wait until she indicates she is comfortable with sexual relations.
- It is important not to blame her for the crime committed against her. Sexual assaults are meant to humiliate and degrade the woman and are an act of aggression. Whether she fought or cooperated with the attacker, she made the best choice possible at the time.

- \* 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 women 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.

Over the last twenty years we have been discovering that many women and children are victims of sexual assault. Although being sexually assaulted is a painful and frightening experience, women and children do heal and become strong again. You will too.

## **HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED**

### **How you can be a support**

Your response towards the survivor of sexual assault can greatly influence how she will deal with the trauma. Those close to the

- \* If you consent, the doctor/nurse examiner can do a complete physical examination, including:
  - a total body examination to check for injuries;
  - an internal examination;
  - collection of forensic samples, when appropriate.
- \* You may decline any portion of the exam and stop the exam at any point. Procedures will be done only with your ongoing consent. If you are unsure about continuing, let the doctors and nurses know this.
- \* If alcohol or drugs may have been involved in the sexual assault, you may be asked if you would like blood and urine collected as forensic samples. If you consent to this, and your blood or urine is tested, the result could show any alcohol and drugs recently taken. However, the drugs used in sexual assault cases usually leave the body quickly and are hard to detect. A negative test does not mean you were not drugged or sexually assaulted.
- \* After the examination you will be given treatment for any injuries you have.
- \* You will also be offered treatment to prevent STIs and pregnancy if relevant. See pages 8-10 for definitions and explanations.
- \* If you have given consent to gather forensic samples, some or all of the following samples may also be taken: pubic hair combings, dried blood stains, fingernail scrapings, and swabs from areas involved in the sexual assault.
- \* If you have not decided about reporting to the police, some hospitals can take forensic samples and store them for up to one year. If later you decide you want to report the assault to police, the samples will be available.

## 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:

- i) **Gonorrhoea**
  - Gonorrhoea 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 gonorrhoea. However, it may take several days after exposure before gonorrhoea can be detected by a test.
  - Antibiotics taken at the time of the examination can treat and prevent gonorrhoea.
- ii) **Chlamydia**
  - Chlamydia occurs in the same places as gonorrhoea.
  - 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.
- iii) **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 gonorrhoea and/or chlamydia but testing is recommended.
- iv) **Herpes**
  - Herpes has a 2 to 15 day incubation period.
  - You may feel feverish, have headaches, pains in your muscles and general malaise.

\* 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. You may also gain or lose weight.

\* **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 to be sexually assaulted. You can't always know who or what situations are going to turn out to be dangerous for you. You made the best choices possible at that time, in that situation.

\* You may wish to express your feelings to a trusted friend or to a support worker. Talking may help you to clear up confusing feelings and to sort out ways to get on 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 places where you feel safe and comforting activities to do.

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.

### **YOUR REACTIONS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT**

- \* It is common to have a range of emotions and feelings after a traumatic experience such as being sexually assaulted.
- \* Each individual responds to and deals with sexual assault in different ways. You may have feelings of: fear, self-blame, depression, anger, shame, confusion, denial, sadness, numbness
- \* You may feel many different emotions after being sexually assaulted. 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 one or many at a time. You might express these feelings by being tense, by crying or by talking, or you may try to hide your feelings and to appear calm.
- \* Few survivors 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.

- 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

#### v) **Hepatitis B**

- Hepatitis B is a virus transmitted by sexual contact.
- If you have been fully immunized you are likely safe from infection.
- The doctor/nurse may recommend that you get immunized with the Hepatitis B vaccine to help protect you against contracting Hepatitis B. You may require more immunizations later in the year.

#### vi) **Other STIs**

- There are other infections that can be passed on during sexual or close physical contact. For example, HIV is considered to be one of these; however, the chances of contracting HIV from a single exposure are low.
- Your doctor/nurse examiner can answer questions you may have about HIV.

Some of these infections may take several weeks to develop symptoms. Therefore, any unusual vaginal discharges, odors, irritations or itching should be checked by a doctor/nurse practitioner. You can be examined at a health or STI clinic.

## **PREGNANCY**

Pregnancy can occur when a woman is sexually assaulted.  
What can be done?

- i) **Emergency Contraception or “Morning-After” Pills.**  
These are hormones that have a high success rate of preventing pregnancy if taken no later than 5 days after unprotected sexual intercourse, but it is best if these pills are taken as soon as possible after the sexual assault. Currently, the most recommended emergency contraceptive is **Plan B**.
- ii) **Urine Pregnancy Test**  
A pregnancy test can be done 3 weeks after the sexual assault to determine if you are pregnant.

## **WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED**

### **Be aware that:**

1. Children are usually abused by people they know and trust – usually a male family member or relation.
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 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.

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

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

Examination Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Our Office Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Attending Doctor / Nurse Examiner: \_\_\_\_\_

**Treatment of:**

**Medication Used:**

Pregnancy: \_\_\_\_\_

Gonorrhea: \_\_\_\_\_

Chlamydia: \_\_\_\_\_

Hepatitis B: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Nausea: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Follow-up Resources**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Recommended Follow-up Tests:**

**Pregnancy test:** You should get a urine pregnancy test 3 weeks after the sexual assault.

**Gonorrhea and Chlamydia test:** Get tested in 3-4 weeks after the sexual assault if you are pregnant or if you have symptoms of vaginal discharge, vaginal or pelvic pain, or pain urinating.

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

**HIV (blood) test:** If *you are* taking post exposure medications get a HIV blood test 1, 3 and 6 months after the sexual assault.  
If *you are not* taking post exposure medications get a HIV blood test 1 and 3 months after the sexual assault.

**Hepatitis B (blood) test:** 1 month and 3 months after the sexual assault.

**Other:**

**Hepatitis B Vaccine**

- in one month \_\_\_\_\_

- in six months \_\_\_\_\_