

What Happens During a Sexual Assault Medical Examination?

Please Note: These exams are *free of charge* and can be performed at Porter Hospital.

The doctor or nurse will usually begin by asking questions about your general health. If you are a female, you will be asked about your menstrual history and your use of contraception. You will also be asked specific questions about the assault. It may be difficult to recall some of the details, and it may be emotionally painful to remember and talk about what happened. Medical personnel ask specific questions to find out what to look for when they examine you. The information you give helps them conduct a thorough physical evaluation. For female victims, this usually involves a pelvic examination.

The doctor or nurse will look for injuries and any other signs that force was used, such as tender areas, marks on your skin, and bruises. Although many sexual assault victims do not appear to sustain physical injuries, it is still important to be examined by a health care provider. If you do have physical injuries, you may be asked to give your consent to have photographs taken. Photographing injuries is important because by the time your assailant is prosecuted in a court hearing, your injuries may have healed.

In addition to checking you for injuries, the doctor or nurse can collect other evidence of the sexual assault. Depending on the types of sexual contact that occurred, the search for physical evidence may include taking samples from the vagina, mouth, or rectum to test for sperm cells and semen (the fluid around the sperm). Other evidence may be obtained from fingernail scrapings, foreign matter on your body, and the clothes you were wearing at the time of the assault.

After the examination is completed, the doctor or nurse will document the findings in a medical record. The written record can later be subpoenaed to assist in the legal process.