

What Happens to the Forensic Samples Collected?

The time following a sexual assault can be very traumatic for individuals. The victim/survivor may or may not want to report the sexual assault to the police, or s/he may be undecided. This is understandable given what has just happened.

The SANE Program allows people to make decisions about reporting the sexual assault to the police.

If the victim/survivor decides to immediately report the assault to the police, the police will be notified. Forensic evidence will be handed over to them at that time (see “What Happens If I Report to the Police?” for more information regarding the reporting process).

The victim/survivor may decide that s/he does not want to involve the police at this time. If the victim/survivor decides not to file a report with police at this time, s/he may still want to have a forensic examination. Through the SANE Program, victims/survivors have the option of having forensic evidence collected, frozen and stored for up to six months. During the six month period, if the victim/survivor decides to report the sexual assault, the SANE Coordinator will contact the police and provide the forensic evidence at that time. They will then proceed with the investigation.



REMEMBER

Sexual assault is never the fault of the victim. Victims/survivors have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at all times during the hospital visit.

About Avalon Sexual Assault Centre: Who We Are

Established in 1983, Avalon Centre is the only sexual assault centre in the Halifax Regional Municipality. We are a registered, not-for-profit, community based, charitable organization. We gratefully received funding from The NS Department of Community Services, The NS Department of Health, The Law Foundation of Nova Scotia, and from special projects and private donations.

Vision Statement:

The Avalon Sexual Assault Centre is a feminist organization working to eliminate sexual assault/abuse, and to change the current socio-political culture that fosters sexism, social injustice and other forms of oppression.

Mission Statement:

To provide services for those affected by sexual violence, with primary emphasis on support, education, counselling and leadership/advocacy services for women.

Guiding Principles

As advocates, counselors, educators, health practitioners and activists, we are committed to providing a leadership role in the community by developing our practice around the following guiding principles:

1. We believe that sexual violence is caused and maintained by social and political imbalances of power. Therefore, we are committed to working with our colleagues, clients, and community using a feminist approach to invoke change and healing at both personal and societal levels.
2. We believe in using a flexible, client-centered approach that supports the inherent right to self-determination. As such, we support clients by being non-judgmental, providing information about their options and affirming their decisions.
3. We believe that healing is a process. Therefore, we offer a variety of program options that reflect different needs and layers of recovery work.
4. We are committed to a practice approach that promotes victim empowerment and acknowledges that the person who commits the violence is responsible for his behaviour.
5. We are committed to reducing barriers to accessing Avalon Centre's confidential services within our existing mandate and resources.
6. We are committed to providing a leadership role in eliminating barriers for access to justice.
7. We are committed to working with grass roots and women's organizations and other community partners on a local, provincial and national level to improve social policy and promote social action.
8. We are committed to fostering an environment that supports self-care and provides professional growth and learning opportunities for staff, students and volunteers.
9. We are committed to being flexible and accountable by developing policies, procedures and programs that are in keeping with our mission statement, principles and resources.
10. We are committed to a women only staff and Board of Directors.

We acknowledge that sexual violence profoundly affects individuals, families and our community. We ask every member of our community to support us in assisting sexual assault/abuse survivors/victims, their partners and non-offending parents to heal from the effects of sexual violence. We challenge all people to commit to a culture free from sexual violence and abuse.

The Sexual Assault
Nurse Examiner
Program & What
Happens at the
Hospital

“Compassionate Care for
Victims of Sexual Assault”

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program (SANE)

The SANE Program is funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health, and coordinated by Avalon Sexual Assault Centre.

A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner is a Registered Nurse who has advanced training and education in forensic examinations of sexual assault victims.

The SANE Program is a partnership with the IWK Health Centre, the QE II Health Sciences Centre, the Dartmouth General Hospital and the Cobequid Community Health Centre. Through this initiative, on-call SANE's will provide immediate care and conduct forensic examinations of victims of sexual violence.

The SANE Program provides:

- Emergency response, 24 hours a day, seven days a week;
- Response to the emergency departments of the IWK, QEII, Dartmouth General Hospitals and the Cobequid Multi-Service Centre, usually within one hour;
- Services to females, males and trans persons of all ages;
- Expert testimony in a court of law;
- Supportive follow-up for victims;
- Storage of forensic evidence for six months.

The SANE Program does not provide:

- Transportation;
- Medical services outside the hospital emergency departments;
- Medical treatment to anyone other than victims of sexual violence.

What Happens at the Hospital?

It is important that a victim/survivor of recent sexual assault/abuse consider seeking medical attention for several reasons:

- To take care of physical needs resulting from the assault/abuse;
- To test for infections and pregnancy;
- To begin treatment if required;
- To collect evidence;
- To prevent undue worry later on.



When the victim/survivor goes to the emergency room at the QEII or Dartmouth General Hospitals or the Cobequid Multi-Service Centre, and tells the medical personnel that s/he has been sexually assaulted, a SANE nurse will be called. She will be able to attend to the victim/survivor's medical needs at this time, and if the victim/survivor chooses to have a forensic examination (evidence collection), the SANE will conduct the examination.

The medical examination involves:

- Taking a medical history;
- Documenting details of the assault/abuse to help identify potential infections, injuries or treatment required;
- Taking blood and urine samples to test for pregnancy and/or infections (follow-up testing may need to occur in 6, 12 and 24 weeks);
- An internal exam (vaginal, rectal, oral) may also be performed at this time.

The victim/survivor may also ask to have a forensic examination. It should be conducted within 72 hours of the assault/abuse. It is preferable, but not mandatory, for the victim/survivor not to shower, bathe, douche, use the washroom, change clothes, eat/drink, or clean teeth, etc. until after the exam is completed, as this may destroy evidence.

Please note, the forensic examination will only be conducted if the victim/survivor has given consent. The victim/survivor can stop the forensic exam at any time.

What is a forensic examination?

A forensic examination includes the steps listed for a medical exam, as well as the following:

- May collect clothing for evidence;
- Taking samples of head and pubic hair;
- A head to toe visual exam looking for bruises, cuts, scratches, blood stains, seminal stains, etc.;
- Fingernail scrapings may be taken;
- Photographs may also be taken of injuries;
- Oral, rectal and vaginal swabs may be taken to examine for blood or semen.

This process takes approximately two hours to complete. Only the SANE nurse(s) and other emergency department personnel need to be present during this exam. The victim/survivor may wish a support person as well (i.e. a friend or a sexual assault worker). The police do not need to be present.

