

Riverbend Resources If You Are a Sexual Assault Survivor

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RIVERBEND - An American is sexually assaulted every 68 seconds, according to the [Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#). While this number is staggering, that also means you aren't alone. If you've been sexually assaulted, there are resources that can help you in the immediate aftermath and during your long-term recovery.

What happens if I go to the emergency room?

The last thing most people want to do after an assault is go to the emergency room, but that's exactly what is recommended. If you go to the ER up to seven days after an assault, they can provide medical assistance and complete a Sexual Assault Evidence

Collection Kit (commonly called a rape kit) that can be used to report the assault to the police.

“We’re not here to judge, we’re here to help,” said Traci Bromaghim, the director of emergency services and the sexual assault coordinator at OSF. “I know that there can be a lot of shame and pain that goes along with these types of assaults. But the ER staff is not here to cast judgment, we’re here to just assist and give them the resources that are available to them.”

Whatever happens in the ER is up to you. Once you’ve disclosed that you have survived an assault, you will be treated by nurse who is specially trained to handle sexual assault. These sexual assault nurse examiners, or SANE nurses, will talk with you and help you decide whether you want to complete an evidence collection kit or not. They will also give you medications to help prevent STIs and pregnancy, if you want.

You will either be treated onsite or transferred to another hospital where SANE nurses are available. But under Illinois law, hospitals have to either treat or transfer sexual assault survivors. You will not be turned away.

How does the Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit work?

The evidence collection kit documents physical injuries and collects DNA samples that might be relevant to proving an assault has taken place. Evidence collection is most effective if it’s done immediately after a crime, so survivors are encouraged to go to the ER as soon as they can.

Bromaghim knows that many people don’t present to the ER right after an assault. It might take a few days for them to process what happened or decide that they want to complete an evidence kit. She wants people to know that the ER can collect evidence up to seven days after the assault.

Just because you agree to undergoing an exam or completing an evidence kit does not mean you have agreed to making a police report. In Illinois, the Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit will be stored for ten years after collection or ten years after the survivor turns 18, whichever is longer. You can decide to wait or press charges later in life, and the evidence from the kit will still be available if it’s within that time frame.

It’s also important to note that you do not have to complete an evidence collection kit at all, and you can also change your mind or decline certain parts of the evidence collection kit if you want to during the exam. The main goal of the ER is not to collect evidence, but to make sure you are physically okay and have the resources you need.

“The ER nurse will then also place other calls,” Bromaghim explained. “So we call our rape crisis advocate, and they are folks that can come and help with resources to the patient. So maybe the survivor needs new clothing or they need help finding a safe place to go or just support, they’ll actually show up and kind of sit with that patient during the exam if they want them to. And that is completely their choice. So if the survivor doesn’t want anyone there, then there’ll be no one there. If the survivor wants their family, their friend, the advocate, whoever they want can be present in the room with them.”

What if I can’t afford to go to the ER?

Whether you decide to complete an evidence collection kit or not, the ER can link you to resources within the state of Illinois or the ER’s network. If you have survived an assault, the ER will discharge you with information about these local resources so you fully understand your rights, the procedures you underwent at the hospital, and some of the options you have for support.

For many people, cost is a deciding factor on whether or not they seek medical care. But this does not have to impact your decision in Illinois, where sexual assault survivors are not charged for their ER visit or resulting medical care under the [Illinois Sexual Assault Survivors Emergency Treatment Act](#).

The ER and SANE nurses want to be as helpful as possible, so if you’re ever confused about part of this process or want to know more about local resources, you can always ask.

“The ER is the one-stop shop for everything,” Bromaghim added. “We are kind of a one-stop shop and we will try to connect you with what resources are available to you in our community.”

There are several more services and resources available throughout the country. Visit [Centers.RAINN.org](#) to find a center near you. Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673 for more help and resources. Remember, surviving a sexual assault feels lonely, but you are not alone.