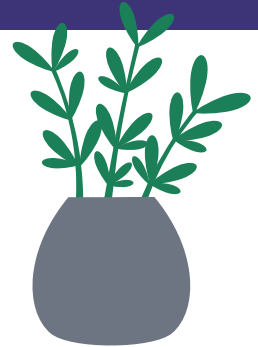




# What is a forensic examination and specimen collection?

**Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)** is a free government service based in Perth specialising in supporting people aged 13 years and over who have been sexually assaulted.

At SARC, the doctors are experts in caring for a person who has experienced recent sexual assault. They also provide advice to other doctors, nurses, health care workers and police across WA on the forensic processes, examination and specimen collection, relevant medical issues, and safety concerns.



## What is a forensic examination after sexual assault?

The purpose of a forensic examination is different from a normal medical examination:

- ▶ The purpose of a medical examination is to diagnose any health problem or injury and to plan treatment.
- ▶ The purpose of a forensic examination is to collect evidence for a legal purpose, such as a police investigation. It may include collecting swabs, urine and/or blood, as well as taking photographs and the collection of clothing.

At SARC, specially trained doctors perform both medical and forensic examinations for patients who live in the Perth metropolitan area. For patients who live rurally or remotely, a forensic and medical examination can be done at the nearest hospital by a doctor and/or SARC-trained nurse.

In the appointment, the doctor will begin by asking questions and gathering information about what has happened, including any symptoms or injuries the patient might have noticed. They will also ask questions about what has happened since the assault in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner.

The doctor will then discuss the different options for examination and specimen collection with the patient and let them decide what they want to happen next.

A specially trained counsellor will support the patient during the appointment at SARC.

## Collection of forensic specimens

### ▶ **Early Evidence Kit (EEK)**

An Early Evidence Kit, or EEK, is for collecting early forensic specimens which may be lost if not collected soon after the assault. Most EEK specimens are self-collected. The patient is instructed on how to do this by the health worker or police officer assisting them. Collecting an EEK allows time for a more detailed forensic examination to be arranged.

### ▶ **Full forensic examination**

In a full forensic examination, injuries are carefully documented, and intimate samples may be collected. A full forensic examination is comprehensive with multiple types of evidence being collected.

### ▶ **Forensic toxicology**

Blood and urine can be collected to test for drugs and/or alcohol. This might be done if 'drink spiking' is suspected.

**Forensic examinations are inclusive and respectful** of all people, including those from Aboriginal and culturally diverse backgrounds.

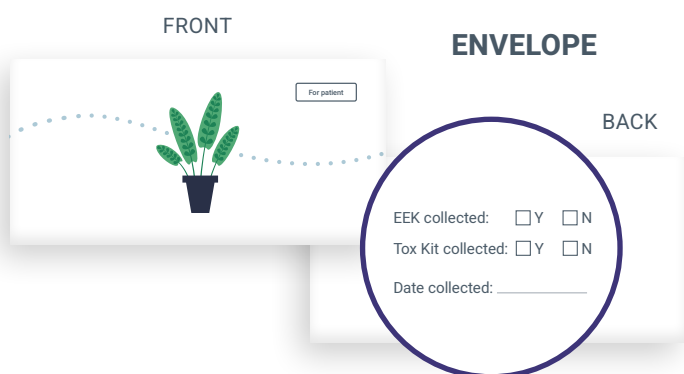


## What happens to forensic specimens after collection?

If the sexual assault has been reported to police, any forensic specimens collected will be handed to police, who will arrange for analysis of the specimens. If a full forensic examination has been done at SARC or a hospital, the police may also speak to the doctor or nurse who completed the forensic examination.

If the patient hasn't decided about reporting to police, forensic specimens may be securely stored for up to 12 months either at SARC or PathWest, a forensic laboratory in Perth. In some regional hospitals forensic specimens may be held for less time. Forensic specimens are not be tested in any way during storage.

At any time after the forensic examination, a patient can decide to report to police. It is important the patient tells the police that forensic specimens have been taken and are being stored. The police will then obtain the patient's consent to collect the specimens from SARC or PathWest.



## Storage of forensic specimens at PathWest

PathWest will store forensic samples securely for up to 12 months. This allows time for a patient to decide about reporting the assault to the police.

When Early Evidence (EEK) or toxicology specimens are collected, the patient receives an envelope containing important information. The date of collection is written on the back of the envelope by the health worker who assisted them. Specimens will be stored for 12 months from this date.

If no report to police is made within the 12 months, and if the patient was 18 years or older when the specimens were collected, the laboratory will securely destroy the forensic specimens. The patient will not be contacted before this happens.

Due to official requirements\* all government records related to children cannot be destroyed. Therefore, if the patient was under 18 years when the specimens were collected, the specimens will be transferred to WA Police to be stored indefinitely. In some cases, the specimens will be analysed and the results stored to preserve evidence.



Further information and resources about sexual assault and SARC services can be found on the SARC website. Scan the QR code.

\* Notice of Disposal Freeze issued on 5 April 2018 by the State Archivist and Executive Director State Records.

There is no timeframe in WA for reporting a sexual assault to the police. The sooner a report is made the easier it is for police to investigate and secure any evidence.

Phone SARC on (08) 6458 1828, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request.

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