



Understanding the chain of evidence for SARC kits

Chain of evidence, also known as chain of custody, is the process and documentation of how evidence is handled from collection until its presentation in court.

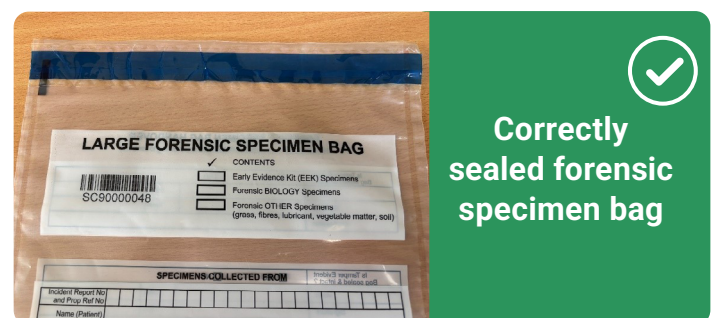
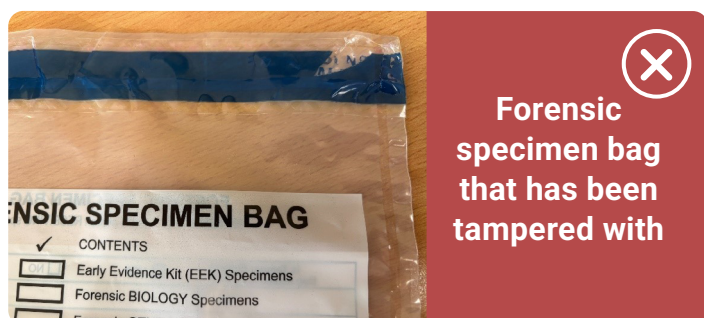
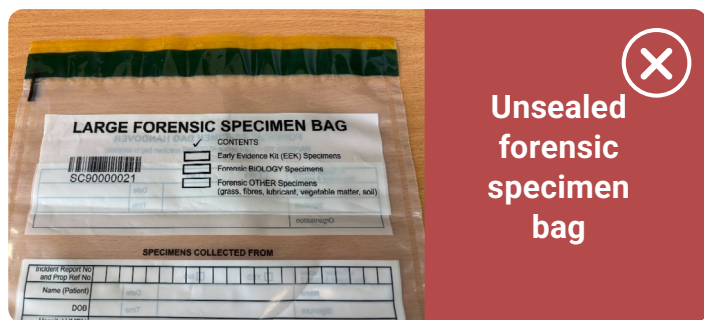
The chain of evidence must be followed to ensure the integrity of the evidence; if the evidence is tampered with, damaged, contaminated or misplaced, it may be inadmissible in court.

SARC has two kits for early forensic specimen collection by healthcare workers: the Early Evidence Kit and the Forensic Toxicology Kit.

When SARC kits are collected, the chain of evidence must be maintained. This is done by:

- ▶ Filling out the specimen list correctly
- ▶ Filling out the front of the forensic specimen bag correctly
- ▶ Sealing the forensic specimen bag correctly and promptly once specimens have been collected
- ▶ Storing collected kits in a secure fridge until ready to be transported off site
- ▶ Not using third-party courier services for the transport of kits offsite
- ▶ Ensuring the receiving laboratory staff check the forensic specimen bag is intact and sign the back on handover.

For both SARC kits, the most important chain of evidence consideration is that the forensic specimen bag remains **intact** and **sealed**. If the bag is not intact and sealed, then the chain of evidence has been broken.



Frequently asked questions

What does intact mean?

Intact means there are no breaks, tears, punctures or holes in the plastic. Staples, for example, would render the bag non-intact and break the chain of evidence.

What does sealed mean?

Sealed means the top seal of the forensic specimen bag remains a blue colour and has not been tampered with. Tampering becomes evident when the blue strip disappears and blue text appears.

What does a secure fridge mean?

A secure fridge means a fridge that is not accessible to the public, such as behind a swipe access-only door. The fridge does not need to be locked.

Who needs to sign the front of the forensic specimen bag?

The person who collected the samples and sealed the forensic specimen bag must fill out the front of the bag.

Who needs to sign the back of the forensic specimen bag?

The receiving laboratory staff (eg: PathWest) must first check the bag is intact and sealed, then sign the back of each bag on receipt of the kit.

I work in an Emergency Department. What happens at shift change?

As the specimens are being stored in a secure fridge, incoming members of staff, such as shift coordinators, do not need to sign the back of the bag.

I have handed the bag to another staff member to walk to the laboratory. Do they need to sign the back of the bag?

No, but inform them that the receiving laboratory staff must sign the back of the bag once they have checked the bag is sealed and intact.

What happens if a mine site drops off a SARC Kit?

If your PathWest lab on site is open, direct the mine site staff to handover directly to the lab.

If the lab is not open, check the bag(s) are intact and sealed. Sign the back of the bag(s) accordingly and store in a secure fridge until the lab is open.

What happens if the SARC kits received from the mine site staff are not intact and sealed?

The best option in this case is to call SARC directly who will advise how to repackage the kit(s).

Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)

Perth Metropolitan area: A free 24-hr emergency service providing medical and counselling services for people who have experienced a recent (within 14 days) sexual assault, and counselling services for any form of unwanted sexual contact that has happened in the past for all genders ages 13 years and above.

WA state-wide area: Advice and education and training can be provided to services across the state of Western Australia.

Call SARC on (08) 6458 1828 or Freecall 1800 199 888.

Email SARC Education and Training on SARCTraining@health.wa.gov.au

SARC Duty Doctor

Call (08) 6458 1820 in **office hours** or via the King Edward Memorial switchboard
(08) 6458 2222 out of hours.

Crisis line for patients

Call (08) 6458 1828
or **1800 199 888**
(freecall from landlines).

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