

Medical Evaluation for Suspected Sexual Abuse

What is sexual abuse?

When a person has any type of sexual activity with a child, it is sexual abuse. It may be:

- touching private parts,
- oral contact,
- sexual intercourse,
- making a child view pornography,
- exposing a child to adult sexual activity.

It is important to note that in most cases of sexual abuse, the child knows the abuser.

Why does my child need a medical exam?

Sexual abuse can sometimes cause injuries or other medical conditions. Because of that, it is important for your child's health and well being that his or her body be checked.

Sometimes, these exam findings are used as evidence in court.

Many times sexual abuse does not leave physical findings. Sometimes the injuries heal so well that they can no longer be found. In most cases the exam is normal. This does not mean that sexual abuse did not occur. The exam is not meant to prove or disprove what the child has said.

Some children feel that their bodies have been damaged by sexual abuse. It can be very helpful for them to hear from a medical provider that their body is healthy and normal or will heal.

What happens during the exam?

The medical exam is done in a very child-friendly manner. Every child is unique and the staff work hard to help put your child at ease.

Some children want to know everything that is going to happen during the exam. Others would rather be distracted. If your child wants, a parent or caretaker is welcome in the exam room to provide support.

- First, a medical history is taken.
- Then a head-to-toe check up is done.
- It is important for the medical provider to view the external genital (private) and anal areas completely. An instrument called a **colposcope** is used to help magnify the area being viewed. The colposcope does not touch your child or cause any pain.
- Girls who have not yet had a period (pre-pubertal) **will not** need an internal vaginal exam. Even girls who have started their periods hardly ever need an internal exam. The exam is always done in the most comfortable way for your child.

What happens during the exam? (continued)

The exam can be seen on a computer monitor in the exam room. Many children are curious and want to look at their genital area on the monitor. If your child does not want to look, it is helpful to distract them with a book or an activity during this part of the exam.

- The exam is recorded. This is done for medical reasons only. The recording is kept in a secure location and does not become part of the medical record. It is never released without a court order.
- A urine test may be done to check for infections. The medical provider may also take swabs from the genital, anal, and/or throat areas. The swabs are very small and soft to keep from causing your child any pain.
- A blood test may need to be done. The medical provider will discuss this with you before it is done.

What happens after the exam?

- Your child will be reassured that his or her body is OK or if there is a medical problem, that it can be treated and your child will heal.
- The results of the exam will be explained to the parent or caretaker.
- A report will become part of your child's medical record.
- A report will be made available to the police officer or social worker investigating the sexual abuse case. Your child's doctor will also have access to the medical report.
- Results from culture tests or blood work will take about one week. A medical provider will call you if any result is abnormal.
- Follow-up care visits or referrals will be made, if needed.

How do I take care of my child at home after the exam?

- Tell your child that they did a great job during the exam! Reassure your child that you support them and will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not ask your child a lot of questions about the suspected abuse, but do listen if they want to talk about it.
- Call the Child Advocacy Center if your child has any concerning medical symptoms or behaviors that seem to be related to the suspected abuse.

ALERT: Call the Child Advocacy Center at 1(414) 277-8980 if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- Any new symptom such as genital discharge or bleeding.
- Pain in the genital or anal area.
- Special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.