

# For People Who Have Been Sexually Assaulted...

What You Need  
To Know about  
STDs and  
Emergency  
Contraception



## FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED...

### What You Need to Know about STDs and Emergency Contraception

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People who have been sexually assaulted often are worried about their risk of becoming pregnant or contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) and have a lot of questions about many subjects. This brochure is intended to give you information about STDs, including HIV, and emergency contraception. If you have questions about this information or would like further information, please ask your health care provider to assist you or see the “Helpful Resources” section of this brochure for phone numbers and Web Sites of places that can help you. Also, if you do not have a health care provider you feel comfortable with, these resources can help you find one.



## INTRODUCTION

# Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Sexual Assault

## **What are STDs?**

STDs (also called sexually transmitted infections or STIs) are infections that are spread through oral, vaginal, or anal sex. If left untreated, STDs can cause serious damage to the reproductive organs, lead to infertility, or lead to other serious health problems. Most STDs are curable if diagnosed and treated early. Even if an STD is not curable, treatment can minimize the effects on your body.

## **What is the Risk of Getting an STD from Sexual Assault?**

The risk of getting an STD from sexual assault is low. Gonorrhea and chlamydia are the STDs most commonly diagnosed after sexual assault. Both of these are curable if diagnosed early. The risk of being infected with HIV from an assault is extremely low.

If an STD is diagnosed after a sexual assault, it does not always mean that the infection occurred during the assault. That is, it is possible that a person had an STD without knowing it before being assaulted.

## **What are the Signs and Symptoms of STDs?**

**Most of the time, people with an STD will not have any symptoms.**

**However, some signs that a person might have an STD include:**

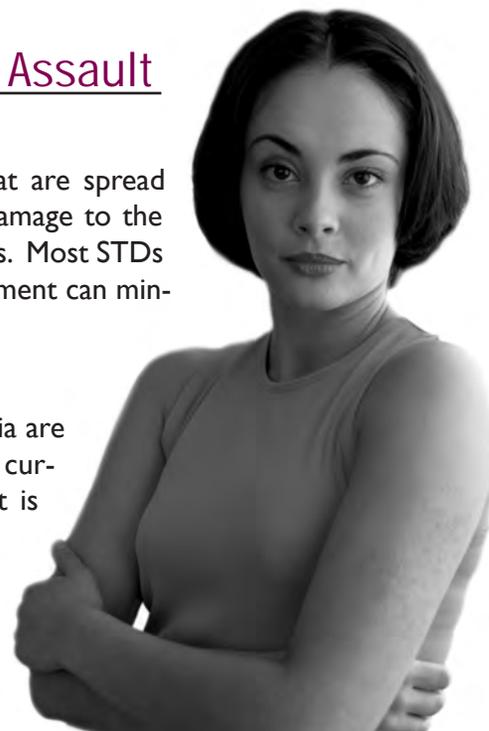
- Itching or burning in the genital or anal area
- Painful urination
- Lower abdominal pain
- Bumps or sores in the genital or anal area
- Unusual bleeding or discharge

Sometimes even if a person has symptoms of an STD, these will go away on their own, but the person will still have an STD. Other times symptoms are very mild and a person might not think anything of them. Even if symptoms are mild or not present, an untreated STD can still cause serious damage to a person's body. Therefore, it is very important to see a health care provider for an examination that includes STD tests to find out if you have been infected after a sexual assault, even if you do not have any symptoms.

## **STD Testing and Treatment After Assault**

After being assaulted, it is important to have an exam as soon as possible to test for possible infection. You also have the option of having a sexual assault forensic medical examination. During this type of exam, a specially trained nurse, called a sexual assault nurse examiner or SANE, will provide a medical assessment and collect evidence. If you would like to have this type of exam, the sexual assault hotline numbers and local rape care center numbers in the "Helpful Resources" section of this brochure can assist you in contacting the SANE Program and locating the hospital sites in your county that participate in the SANE program.

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If you seek medical care after an assault, your health care provider or SANE may give you medications for certain STDs in case you were exposed to these during the assault. These medications, however, are not 100% effective so it is important to look for any symptoms and to follow-up with your health care provider in two to three weeks for additional evaluation and to ensure you have been effectively treated. Also, keep in mind that your health care provider may decide to wait for STD test results to determine appropriate treatment before giving you medication.

New Jersey has public clinics throughout the state that can provide confidential testing for STDs, including HIV, for victims of sexual assault or anyone else concerned about infection. Please see the “Helpful Resources” section of this brochure.

### **Could I Infect Someone with an STD?**

It is possible to infect someone with whom you are having oral, anal, or vaginal sex with an STD if you were infected during an assault. It is a good idea to wait to have sex until you have had the appropriate follow-up tests 2-3 weeks after your initial health care visit and you have received the results of any STD follow-up tests. If you do have oral, anal, or vaginal sex, it is important to use a latex barrier, such as a condom.

## **HIV/AIDS and Sexual Assault**

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### **What is the Risk of Getting HIV from Sexual Assault?**

The risk of being infected with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) through a sexual assault is low. Penetration of the vagina or anus by a penis, or contact with blood is the most likely way HIV would be transmitted during a sexual assault. There is a lower risk of being infected through oral sex.

If there is a reason to believe you may have been exposed to HIV, there is medicine that might help prevent HIV/AIDS if taken within 72 hours. The SANE, or other health care provider you see, will know if this is an option for you.

### **What are the Signs and Symptoms of HIV/AIDS?**

HIV infection is a long-term illness. A person can look and feel healthy with no symptoms of HIV for years with the virus in their body. Sometimes a person will have flu-like symptoms within a few weeks of being infected with HIV but often there are no symptoms. Symptoms may become more severe later.

### **HIV Testing and Treatment After Assault**

It is important to have an HIV test as soon as possible after an assault. HIV is usually detected through a simple blood test. Sometimes cells taken from the mouth or a urine sample will be used instead. Rapid HIV testing, using blood or oral fluid, may be available at the initial examination and/or follow-up testing. Results with this type of test are available within 20-40 minutes. However, these preliminary results need to be confirmed with a test sent to a laboratory. Also, if a person has been infected with HIV, it can take up to six months for a test to detect HIV. Therefore, even if your test results are negative (do not show HIV), it is important to have follow-up tests periodically up to six months after the assault. The timeframe for follow-up tests that is often suggested is: *4-6 weeks, three months, and six months after a suspected exposure to HIV.*



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New Jersey has free HIV testing sites throughout the state, many of which provide rapid HIV testing. You may ask your health care provider, SANE, or call the NJ HIV and STD hotline (listed in the “Helpful Resources” section) for more information about HIV testing options and procedures.

### ***HIV Testing of Offenders***

New Jersey State laws do allow for HIV testing of sexual offenders under certain circumstances. While finding out the HIV status of an offender may be helpful, it is still important that you get tested yourself. It is possible for an offender who tests negative for HIV to test positive on a follow-up test. The nature of the assault, the stage of any disease, your own immunity, and other factors make your own test results much more important than the test results of an offender. For more information about this or other sexual assault laws in New Jersey, contact the **National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-601-7200.**



## ***Pregnancy and Emergency Contraception***

Women who have been sexually assaulted are often worried about becoming pregnant from the assault. It is possible to prevent pregnancy even after an assault with emergency contraception (also called EC) if taken within 120 hours, or five days. All New Jersey emergency health care facilities are required by law to provide EC information to patients who have been sexually assaulted. EC services must also be provided when requested. If EC is not an option for you for medical reasons, your regular or emergency health care provider, or SANE will explain this to you as well as answer any questions you might have about EC.

### ***What is Emergency Contraception?***

EC (emergency contraception) is a way to prevent pregnancy even after unprotected vaginal intercourse. Many women who have been raped choose this option to prevent pregnancy. The most common method of EC is in pill form (also called ECPs, or Morning After pills).

### ***How Soon Do You Have to Use Emergency Contraception?***

Emergency contraception pills should be taken within 120 hours or five days of unprotected vaginal intercourse. Therefore, it is important to seek health care as soon as possible if there is any chance you may have gotten pregnant from an assault.

### ***How Does Emergency Contraception Work?***

EC prevents pregnancy in one or more ways: by temporarily stopping eggs from being released, stopping fertilization, or stopping a fertilized egg from attaching to the womb. EC will not work if you are already pregnant and will not cause an abortion.

### ***Are There Side Effects?***

EC can cause some women to feel nauseous. Other side effects might be sore breasts, headaches, or abdominal cramping. These side effects usually last for one day. EC can also cause a woman's next period to come early.

### ***What if I am Not Sure if I Need Emergency Contraception?***

If you are confused about your risk for pregnancy or if you have any questions or concerns, your regular or emergency health care provider, or SANE should be able to help you figure out what health care procedures are best for you. If you do not have a health care provider you feel comfortable with, you can call one of the resources listed in the “Helpful Resources” section of this brochure to help you find a clinic that will be sensitive to your needs.

# Helpful Resources

*The following resources provide free, confidential information and can help you find answers to your questions or find the help you need.*



## ***National Sexual Assault Hotline/NJ State Hotline***

**1-800-601-7200 or 1-800-656-HOPE**  
**[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)**

Connects NJ residents to their local rape crisis centers, answers questions, and provides information about counseling, evidentiary exams, prevention, statistics and legal matters.

## ***New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault***

**(609) 631-4450**  
**[www.njcasa.org](http://www.njcasa.org)**

Information about support services, local rape crisis centers, counseling, referrals, and legal information.

## ***New Jersey AIDS/STD Hotline***

**1-800-624-2377**

Information about HIV and STD transmission, symptoms, testing and treatment. They can help you find out where to get tested and treated.

## ***Emergency Contraceptive Hotline***

**1-800-NOT 2 LATE (668-2528)**  
**[www.not-2-late.com](http://www.not-2-late.com)**

Information about emergency contraception and where to find emergency contraceptive clinical services.

## ***Planned Parenthood***

**1-800-230-PLAN**

Information about clinical services, including STD testing and emergency contraception, and where to find a health center near you.

## ***New Jersey Family Health Line***

**1-800-328-3838**

Information about community health care clinics in New Jersey and where you can find one near you.

# New Jersey Sexual Assault Programs and Rape Care Centers



**To find a sexual assault program or  
rape care center in your area, call:**

**1-800-601-7200**

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