



## **CORONAVIRUS, CERTIFIED RAPE CRISIS CENTERS AND THE MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAM (MFE) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DOCUMENT**

Certified Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) have a duty to stay up to date and follow the CDC guidance / recommendations for preventing spread of COVID-19. This guidance was developed to assist all RCCs with their Coronavirus Prevention Plan and is based on the CDC and the Arkansas Department of Health's recommendations. The CDC recommends that health care providers screen all persons for symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) before entering a healthcare facility. This is in alignment with preventing spread of COVID-19 and it is recommended that the CDC screening questions for Coronavirus be implemented.

If it is possible to screen survivors prior to their arrival at the RCC this would be appropriate. If it is not possible then it may be done upon their arrival. The person conducting the screening questions may want to consider wearing a face mask until the questions have been answered.

### **SCREENING FOR CORONAVIRUS:**

All survivors who arrive at your RCC should be screened for COVID19. See flowchart to determine course of action.

### **SCREENING QUESTIONS:**

1. Have you traveled outside of the United States or have been on a cruise within the last 14 days? If yes, were you tested and cleared from the CDC airport staff to be in the general public? Were you instructed to self-isolate or were you quarantined for the amount of time to be cleared to be in the general public?
  - a) Have you shared close quarters (at work, social settings or at home) with anyone who has traveled outside of the United States or have been on a cruise within the last 14 days?
  - b) Have you shared close quarters (at work, social settings or at home) with anyone who has tested positive for COV19?
2. Do you have a fever?
3. Do you have any respiratory problems, cough or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath)?

*Answers to these questions will impact the RCC's action. Therefore, to assist the RCC with the action to be taken, the tables below provide you with question, a possible answer and the steps the RCC should follow based on the answer given.*

If “no” is the answer to all of the questions, proceed with the MFE and the SANE should follow the MFE protocol of wearing a face mask and gloves during the exam. The SANE may consider taking additional precautions by wearing a gown and eye protection.

**FOR ANY SURVIVOR who must self-isolate / self quarantine, ask:** “Are you safe to go home and self quarantine?” If the answer is no, provide assistance to the survivor to obtain a safe place for 14 days or more.

**It is best practice not to share pens with a survivor.**

**Question #1 Series:** Have you traveled outside of the United States or on a cruise within the last 14 days? If yes, were you tested and cleared from the CDC airport staff to be in the general public? Were you instructed to self-isolate or were you quarantined so you could be cleared to be in the general public?

- a) Have you shared close quarters (at work, social settings or at home) with anyone who has traveled outside of the United States or have been on a cruise within the last 14 days?
- b) Have you shared close quarters (at work, social settings or at home) with anyone who has tested positive for COV19?

**Answer:** Yes, the person has traveled outside of the country or been on a cruise within the last 14 days, and the person has not been cleared to be in the general public **OR yes to 1 a) or 1 b)**

**Steps to Follow:**

- STOP and provide the person with a face mask and gloves to wear
  - Instruct the survivor to go home and self-isolate for 14 days
  - Give them the UAMS HealthNow Coronavirus Hotline number, 800-632-4502
- Per the CDC, provide the following information to the survivor prior to them leaving your facility:
- o The following steps should be taken to monitor your health and practice social distancing:
    - Take your temperature with a thermometer two times a day and monitor for fever. Also watch for cough or trouble breathing.
    - Stay home and avoid contact with others. Do not go to work or school for this 14-day period. Discuss your work situation with your employer before returning to work.
    - Do not take public transportation, taxis, or ride-shares during the time you are practicing social distancing.
    - Avoid crowded places (such as shopping centers and movie theaters) and limit your activities in public.
    - Keep your distance from others (about 6 feet or 2 meters).
    - Contact your health care provider if you develop a fever and/or have difficulty breathing.

**MFE Considerations:** The SANE should coordinate with the survivor to obtain the medical history and the forensic history over the phone (be sure to document this and why it was over the phone). The RCC must weigh the benefits and risk of each individual case to determine if an MFE is done prior to the survivor leaving the facility. If it is determined the MFE should be done due to the sexual assault circumstances, the SANE should follow infectious disease / personal protection equipment (PPE) protocols – a face mask, a gown, gloves and eye protection. However, prior to the MFE, the SANE should have a conversation with law enforcement regarding other evidence that may have been collected by them. If LE has collected evidence that has a high potential of rendering DNA (underwear worn at the time of the assault) then conducting an MFE might be omitted (benefits vs risk to SANE).

**Question #1 Series:** Have you traveled outside of the United States or on a cruise within the last 14 days? If yes, were you tested and cleared from the CDC airport staff to be in the general public? Were you instructed to self-isolate or were you quarantined so you could be cleared to be in the general public?

**Answer:** Yes, the person has traveled to one of these countries, and the person has been cleared to be in the general public and does not have a fever, cough or trouble breathing.

**Steps to Follow & MFE Considerations:**

- Proceed with an MFE using SANE protocol (gloves, gown, eye protection and face mask).

**Question #2:** Do you have a fever?

*(A fever is considered 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit / 38 degrees Celsius or higher.)*

**Answer:** Yes to **only** this question.

**Steps to Follow & MFE Considerations:**

- The survivor and RCC personnel should wear a face mask as soon as there is in-person contact and consider the survivor at risk.
- Consider obtaining all medical history questions and the forensic history via the phone or at a distance of six feet or greater.
- The SANE may conduct the MFE and the SANE should follow infectious disease / personal protection equipment (PPE) protocols – a face mask, a gown, gloves and eye protection.
  - If gowns are unavailable, instruct all personnel to not have physical contact with the survivor.
  - Eye protection – consider buying goggles / protective glasses that can be sanitized between SANEs or buy one for each SANE.
- Instruct the survivor to call their health care provider or the UAMS HealthNow Coronavirus Hotline number, 800-632-4502 if fever continues and / or respiratory problems, cough, or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath) develops with the fever.

**Question #3:** Do you have any respiratory problems, cough, or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath)?

**Answer:** Yes to **only** this question.

**Steps to Follow & MFE Considerations:**

- The survivor and RCC personnel should wear a face mask as soon as there is in-person contact and consider the survivor at risk.
- Consider obtaining all medical history questions and the forensic history via the phone or at a distance of six feet or greater.

- The SANE may conduct the MFE and the SANE should follow infectious disease / personal protection equipment (PPE) protocols – a face mask, a gown, gloves and eye protection.
  - o If gowns are unavailable, instruct all personnel to not have physical contact with the survivor.
  - o Eye protection – consider buying goggles / protective glasses that can be sanitized between SANEs or buy one for each SANE.
- Instruct the survivor to call their health care provider or the UAMS HealthNow Coronavirus Hotline number, 800-632-4502 if respiratory problems, cough, or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath) continue and / or a fever develops.

**Questions #2 & #3:**

**#2** Do you have a fever?

**#3** Do you have any respiratory problems, cough, or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath)?

**Answer:** Yes to **both** questions.

**Steps to Follow & MFE Considerations:**

- Consider the survivor at risk for Coronavirus.
- Have the survivor put a face mask on immediately and provide them with gloves to wear.
- Send home to self-quarantine.
  - o MFE should not be done at the standalone center. The MFE should be delayed and instruct the survivor to call their health care provider or the UAMS HealthNow Coronavirus Hotline number, 800-632-4502 .
- If at the hospital, follow their protocols regarding PPE and MFE.
- Survivor to avoid contact with others.
- The SANE may coordinate, with the survivor, to obtain the medical and forensic history over the phone (be sure to document this and why it was over the phone).

**If the RCC receives word that a survivor has tested positive for Coronavirus, is hospitalized and desires a forensic exam.....**

The RCC must weigh the benefits and risk of each individual case to determine if an MFE will be done. If it is determined the MFE should be done, the RCC should make arrangements with the hospital for the exam to be completed. However, the RCC / SANE should have a conversation with law enforcement regarding other evidence that may have been collected by them. If LE has collected evidence that has a high potential of rendering DNA (underwear worn at the time of the assault) then conducting an MFE might be omitted (benefits vs risk to SANE). All of this must be documented.

**If the RCC receives word that a sexual assault survivor is positive for Coronavirus, is NOT hospitalized and desires a forensic exam.....**  
**The MFE cannot be done,** the survivor is to follow their health care provider's instructions. The RCC / SANE should have a conversation with law enforcement regarding other evidence that may have been collected by them. If LE has collected evidence that has a high potential of rendering DNA (underwear worn at the time of the assault) then conducting an MFE might be omitted (benefits vs risk to SANE). All of this must be documented.

**If the survivor has symptoms but is negative for Coronavirus...**

Have the survivor come in for the MFE but since a false negative is possible, follow the instructions below for the survivor at risk.

The SANE may conduct the MFE and the SANE should follow infectious disease / personal protection equipment (PPE) protocols – a face mask, a gown, gloves and eye protection.

- If gowns are unavailable, instruct all personnel to not have physical contact with the survivor.
- Eye protection – consider buying goggles / protective glasses that can be sanitized between SANEs or buy one for each **SANE**.

Instruct the survivor to call their health care provider or the UAMS HealthNow Coronavirus Hotline number, 800-632-4502 if respiratory problems, cough, or difficulty breathing (shortness of breath) and fever worsens or continues.

## **ADVOCATES AND THE MFE**

The protocol for advocates in the exam room should consist of the advocate wearing a face mask and gloves if the MFE is performed on a survivor at risk. If a survivor has answered no to all the screening questions, the advocate may consider wearing a face mask only.

**Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault strongly urges independent forensic testing facilities to follow the Public Health Model for safety and only admit essential personnel (SANE/client) into the medical exam room.** The coalition encourages these agencies to find alternative methods to provide advocacy during the exam (i.e. video conferencing).

**It is the recommendation of the International Association of Forensic Nurses advocates should not be admitted to the exam room during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Per the CDC:** [Mode of transmission](#): Early reports suggest person-to-person transmission most commonly happens during close exposure to a person infected with COVID-19, primarily via respiratory droplets produced when the infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplets can land in the mouths, noses, or eyes of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs of those within close proximity. The contribution of small respirable particles, sometimes called aerosols or droplet nuclei, to close proximity transmission is currently uncertain. However, airborne transmission from person-to-person over long distances is unlikely.

## REFERENCES

[CDC website](#)

[UAMSHHealthNow COVID-19 Updates](#)

[Arkansas Department of Health](#)

IAFN Guidance

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.forensicnurses.org/resource/resmgr/docs/covid\\_guidance\\_update.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.forensicnurses.org/resource/resmgr/docs/covid_guidance_update.pdf)

IAFN video: Collaborating with Advocates

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Mkomtkzso&feature=youtu.be>

IAFN Covid 19 Resource Page

<https://www.forensicnurses.org/page/covid>

IAFN YouTube video

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Mkomtkzso&feature=emb\\_err\\_watch\\_on\\_yt](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Mkomtkzso&feature=emb_err_watch_on_yt)