



Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault: Recommended Officer and Agency Protocols During COVID-19

The following protocols are recommendations put forth by the Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault based on information provided by the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). The following are recommendations only and are not mandatory.

Active Scene Reports:

All active sexual assault or rape scene responses should remain a high priority and be considered a serious offense that merits a personal emergency response. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) such as a quality face mask and gloves are recommended for any in-person responses. The following steps are recommended:

1. If the victim wishes (*should always be a priority but remember that the victim does have the right to decline*) to have a forensic medical exam, it is recommended that the officer/agency contact the local hospital to advise them of the situation prior to the victim going to the hospital. With the increase of patients being seen at medical centers and temporary triage areas being established, it will greatly help the medical providers be able to establish an adequate space that is needed for the victim upon his/her arrival.
2. If your community has access to or is connected by a surrounding community that has access to a Rape Crisis Center that has the capability of conducting forensic exams in house, it is highly recommended that you contact these agencies first before contacting the local hospital. It is also recommended that an officer escort the victim to the hospital or crisis center to assist the victim through the process. Having a police presence may be helpful to the prioritization of the victim.
3. Once at the hospital/crisis center, follow the below steps outlined in the *Hospital Reports* section.

Hospital Reports:

If you receive a call that a victim is at the hospital requesting to make a police report, it is recommended that you follow these steps:

1. Ask to speak to the victim by phone. Identify yourself and explain that you are there to help the victim through this process. Explain that due to the COVID-19 virus, your agency has adjusted some of the response protocols and as a part of that effort, you are speaking to him/her by phone as a first step in the reporting process. Ensure that they know that you and your agency are taking their experience very seriously and will be there throughout the entire process to help them.
2. Ask if the victim would like to speak with an advocate from a local crisis center, or if there is anyone that you can contact for them. Note that due to strict hospital COVID-19 policies, it is unlikely that an advocate or family members/friends will be allowed to enter the hospital in person. Explain that you can arrange for these individuals to be contacted via phone or video calls.
3. Inquire whether a forensic medical exam has been performed. If not, explain the importance of the exam to the victim and encourage them to have this completed (*should always be a priority but remember that the victim does have the right to decline*). If the exam has already been completed, it is recommended that arrangements be made to escort/transport the victim from the hospital to a local crisis center where a soft space may be utilized (or if your agency has its own soft space) to conduct the interview process. Removing the victim from the hospital setting as quickly as possible is both helpful to the victim and the healthcare facility.
4. Before escorting/transporting the victim to a crisis center setting, be sure that you contact the center beforehand to ensure that they have a staff member that can provide you access and that the facility has been properly sanitized.
5. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) such as a quality face mask and gloves are recommended for both the officer and the victim to wear during the escort/transport as well as throughout the interview process. It is very important that the victim be given the same equipment as the officer/staff.
6. At the completion of the interview, the officer should assist the victim in going to a safe place and providing all necessary contact information needed for continued advocacy services, investigator questions, and/or any other community resources that are available to assist the victim.



Delayed Reports:

If your agency receives a call from a victim wishing to report a sexual assault or rape that occurred in the past, the following steps are recommended:

1. Speak with the victim by phone, if possible. Identify yourself and explain that you are there to help them through this process. Explain that due to the COVID-19 virus, your agency has adjusted some of the response protocols and as a part of that effort, you are speaking to him/her by phone as a first step in the reporting process. Ensure that they know that you and your agency are taking their experience very seriously and will be there throughout the entire process to help them.
2. Determine the time frame that exist from the time of the assault to the time of the call. If the time frame is less than 96 hours, refer to the above *Active Scene Report* recommendations. If the assault has been over the 96-hour threshold, a forensic exam is not recommended.
3. Ask if the victim would like to speak with an advocate from a local crisis center, or if there is anyone that you can contact for them.
4. Ask the victim if they have a way to connect via video messaging. If so, it is recommended that this method is used to take the initial report and possibly the investigative interview to best protect all parties' health while still maintaining an in-person and more personal form of contact with the victim. If the victim does not have this capability, ask if the victim is ok with making the initial report with you by phone, or if they would prefer to speak in person it is recommended that arrangements are made with your local crisis center to utilize their soft space (unless your agency has its own) to conduct the reporting/ interview process. If in-person contact is going to be made, refer to the above *Hospital Reporting* section using recommended steps 4-6.

If your agency has any questions, concerns, you need information about resources in your area, or if there is a situation not covered above, please call us at (501) 246-3276 ext. 105. We are here to assist your agency and will continue to help provide as much updated information, training, and resources as possible.

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