



FOOTHILLS CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

My Child is Having a Forensic Medical Examination: Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

Your child's forensic evaluation may include a forensic medical examination and is routine where sexual abuse is alleged to have taken place. The medical exam will ensure that your child receives *appropriate and specialized* medical care for any health concerns related to sexual or physical abuse. Highly trained, specialized medical staff will explain everything to you before the exam and make every effort to ensure the comfort of you and your child. Generally, the medical exam takes less than an hour.

With Whom?

Your child's appointment will be with **Dr. Jeanne Parrish at the University of Virginia (UVA) Medical Center**. Her office phone number is 434-297-5022.

Where?

Check-in is located at the registration desk at the **UVA Hospital Emergency Department, located at 1215 Lee St, Charlottesville, VA 22908**. Free valet parking (with validation) for the Emergency Department is available. You can also self-park in the Lee Street Parking Garage directly across the street from University Hospital and Emergency Department.

Dr. Parrish will do her best to meet you at the registration desk. If she is not there to meet you, please let them know you are here to see Jeanne Parrish for an exam. You can show them this handout.

Other Questions

- **Why does my child need to have a forensic medical examination?**

To see if there are any injuries, to test for possible sexually-transmitted infections, and to provide a report for the investigators. The exam will also reassure you and your child that he/she is healthy and help to ensure that the child receives any needed follow-up care.

- **The abuse happened a long time ago, does my child still need a forensic medical?**

Yes, some injuries may still be seen. And in cases where there is no injury, your child still needs to be reassured of his/her health and have any questions answered.

- **My child already had a medical examination. Why does my child need another medical examination?**

Dr. Parrish and others on the UVA forensic medical team have had advanced training in the field of child abuse and working with children. It is like having your child's doctor diagnose a heart murmur and then referring you to a heart doctor for another exam. The UVA forensic doctors and nurses are specialists who can assist the detectives and social workers in their efforts to protect your child.

- **What should I tell my child about why he/she is having the examination?**

You know your child best, and explanations vary depending on a child's age. Be honest. Tell her/him that she/he is here for a physical examination or checkup, and that the doctor will perform an exam from

head to toe. Give your child enough notice of the scheduled appointment so that he or she doesn't feel surprised by having a medical examination.

- **Will it hurt?**

Children accept examinations quite well. During the examination, Dr. Parrish or another member of the team will explain what she/he is doing and what she/he is looking at during the examination. Children are encouraged to ask questions and to tell the doctor if it hurts.

If at any point during the examination you cannot continue, the exam will be stopped. If your child cannot continue, the examination can be rescheduled.

- **What happens during the medical examination?**

Before the examination, the medical team will meet with you to talk about your child and your concerns, review the child's medical history, answer any questions, and explain the examination. After the exam, the medical team will again meet with you to discuss the results and to answer any questions.

The exam is like the physical exam your child gets with his/her primary care provider, including height, weight, and blood pressure; listening to the heart and lungs; and looking in the ears, mouth, and eyes.

When sexual abuse has been alleged, a genital exam will be needed. If a genital exam is needed for girls who have not reached puberty, the genital examination is only a look at the outside of the genitals; speculums will not be used. In adolescents, sometimes a speculum is needed to see inside the vagina, but usually it is not used. For boys, only the outside is examined. During the genital portion of the examination, a digital camera is used to document the exam. The camera is used to magnify the area and to document the examination so that your child will not have to have another exam.

- **Who has access to my child's photos and video?**

Only the medical team and people involved in the investigation have access to your child's photos and video.

- **Will my child be tested for sexually-transmitted infections?**

Yes, if needed. Most can be tested using a urine sample. If there is concern that your child was exposed to a sexually-transmitted disease that requires blood tests to detect, the forensic staff will discuss this with you before drawing blood. If a sexually-transmitted infection is detected, the doctor will prescribe antibiotics and make sure your child gets follow-up care.

- **Can I be in the room with my child during the examination?**

Yes. However, if your child requests that you not be there, the medical team will honor your child's request. If at any point during the examination, your child wants you to come in, a member of the medical team will get you.

- **If there is no evidence, does that mean nothing happened?**

No. Most exams don't show any evidence of injury. Children heal quickly and some types of abuse don't leave any scars that can be seen on an exam.

- **If there is no medical evidence, will that hurt the investigation?**

No. In most cases there is no medical evidence. The doctor or forensic nurse will provide investigators with a medical report explaining why there are no medical findings. The doctor or forensic nurse can provide court testimony regarding your child's medical examination.