



*Empowering survivors of*

*Gender-Based Violence*

## MEDICAL CARE AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT

### Understanding Your Medical Options, Rights and Follow-Up Care

Following a sexual assault, your health, wellbeing, and recovery are important.

Even if you have no visible injuries, seeking medical care as soon as possible can help protect your physical health, provide access to preventative treatments, identify any unseen injuries, and connect you with additional support services.

Medical care is available whether or not you choose to report the assault to the police. This guide explains the medical care options available to survivors and what you can expect during the healthcare process.

### Why Seeking Medical Care Is Important

Medical professionals can assist with:

- ✓ Assessing and treating physical injuries
- ✓ Preventing HIV infection through Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)
- ✓ Preventing or treating sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- ✓ Preventing pregnancy through emergency contraception
- ✓ Assessing the need for Hepatitis B prevention
- ✓ Conducting a forensic examination if appropriate
- ✓ Documenting medical findings
- ✓ Providing referrals for counselling and emotional support

Remember: Not all injuries are immediately visible, and trauma can affect both physical and emotional wellbeing.

### My Medical Care Checklist

Use this checklist during your medical appointment.

#### **During My Medical Visit**

- ☐ Physical injuries assessed
- ☐ HIV PEP discussed
- ☐ Emergency contraception discussed
- ☐ STI prevention or treatment discussed
- ☐ Hepatitis B assessment completed
- ☐ Forensic examination explained
- ☐ J88 form completed (if applicable)
- ☐ Follow-up appointments scheduled
- ☐ Counselling or support referrals provided

## Understanding HIV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

### What Is PEP?

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is medication that can significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection following possible exposure.

PEP is available to survivors of sexual assault and rape.

### **When Must PEP Be Started?**

PEP should be started:

- ✓ As soon as possible after the assault
- ✓ Within 72 hours (3 days)

The earlier treatment begins, the more effective it is.

After 72 hours, PEP is generally no longer effective in preventing HIV infection.

### **How Long Does Treatment Last?**

PEP must be taken:

**Every day for 28 days**

It is important to complete the entire course of treatment as prescribed.

### **Possible Side Effects**

Some people may experience:

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Dizziness
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach discomfort

Most side effects are temporary and manageable.

If side effects become severe, contact your healthcare provider.

### **My PEP Record**

**Pep Started:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Exected End Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Follow-up Appointment:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Emergency Contraception**

If pregnancy is a concern following a sexual assault, emergency contraception may be available.

Emergency contraception can help prevent pregnancy if taken within the recommended timeframe after the assault.

The sooner it is taken, the more effective it may be.

### **Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider**

- ☐ What emergency contraception options are available to me?
- ☐ How effective is the treatment?
- ☐ What side effects should I expect?
- ☐ Do I require follow-up care?
- ☐ When should I return for additional testing?

## **STI Prevention and Treatment**

Sexual assault may increase the risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Your healthcare provider may recommend:

- ✓ STI screening
- ✓ Preventative medication
- ✓ Treatment where necessary
- ✓ Follow-up testing

### **Common STIs That May Be Discussed**

- Gonorrhoea
- Chlamydia
- Syphilis
- HIV
- Hepatitis B

Some infections may not cause immediate symptoms, which is why follow-up care is important.

## **Hepatitis B Prevention**

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that can be transmitted through infected bodily fluids.

Depending on your circumstances and vaccination history, a healthcare professional may recommend:

- ✓ Hepatitis B vaccination
- ✓ Preventative treatment
- ✓ Follow-up testing

If you are unsure whether you have previously been vaccinated, discuss this with your healthcare provider.

## **Understanding the Forensic Examination**

A forensic examination is a specialised medical examination that may assist with both healthcare and legal processes.

The examination is conducted by a trained healthcare professional.

### **The Purpose of the Examination**

The examination may help to:

- ✓ Assess and treat injuries
- ✓ Document medical findings
- ✓ Collect forensic evidence
- ✓ Support possible legal proceedings

### **What Happens During the Examination?**

The healthcare professional may:

- Ask questions about the assault
- Examine and document injuries
- Collect DNA evidence
- Collect blood, urine, saliva, hair, or other samples
- Record medical findings
- Provide treatment and medication

You can ask questions at any stage of the process.

You should always be treated with dignity, sensitivity, and respect.

## Important Information

If possible before the examination, avoid:

- Bathing or showering
- Washing your hands
- Brushing your teeth
- Changing your clothing

If you have already done any of these things, you should still seek medical care. Medical treatment and forensic evidence collection may still be possible.

## Understanding the J88 Form

### What Is a J88?

A J88 is an official South African medico-legal form completed by a healthcare professional after examining a survivor of assault or sexual violence.

The form records:

- ✓ Physical injuries
- ✓ Medical findings
- ✓ Evidence collected during the examination
- ✓ Information that may assist in criminal proceedings

### Why Is the J88 Important?

The J88 form may become important evidence in a criminal investigation or court case.

The original document forms part of the official police docket.

You have the right to ask questions about the examination and the findings recorded.

## Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

Use this section during your appointment.

- ☐ Do I qualify for HIV PEP?
- ☐ Do I need emergency contraception?
- ☐ Should I receive treatment for STIs?
- ☐ Do I need Hepatitis B prevention?
- ☐ What follow-up tests are required?
- ☐ When should I return for another appointment?
- ☐ Are counselling or support services available?
- ☐ Is a forensic examination recommended?
- ☐ Has a J88 been completed if required?

## My Follow-Up Care Plan

Medical Facility: \_\_\_\_\_

Healthcare Professional: \_\_\_\_\_

### Follow-Up Appointments

| APPOINTMENT              | DATE | NOTES |
|--------------------------|------|-------|
|                          |      |       |
| Follow -Up Medical Visit |      |       |
| HIV Test                 |      |       |
| STI Screening            |      |       |
| Counselling Appointment  |      |       |
| Other                    |      |       |

### Personal Notes

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### Final Message

Seeking medical care after a sexual assault is an important step in protecting your health and wellbeing. Even when injuries are not visible, prompt medical attention can provide access to treatment, preventative care, emotional support, and forensic services.

You deserve compassionate healthcare, accurate information, dignity, respect, and support throughout your recovery journey.

**Your health matters. Your wellbeing matters. You deserve care and support.**