



**Healthier  
Scotland**  
Scottish  
Government



Information about the  
**NHS Sexual Assault Response Coordination Service**

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## **SARCS**

**DON'T KNOW WHERE TO TURN  
IF YOU'VE BEEN RAPED OR  
SEXUALLY ASSAULTED?  
TURN TO SARCS.**

# WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO ME?

If you've recently been raped or sexually assaulted, it's understandable if you don't know what to do or where to turn.

SARCS is a dedicated NHS service which can offer healthcare and support in the days after an assault, if you're not ready or unsure whether to go to the police.

## Police report

If you've been raped or sexually assaulted, you can report it to the police at any time. Details about how to contact Police Scotland are provided at the end of this leaflet.

Depending on when the assault happened, the police can support you to attend a **SARCS**, where the staff will look after your immediate health and wellbeing needs. For example, they can check if you're at risk of pregnancy and can test for sexually transmitted infection. If the assault took place within the last 7 days, it may also be appropriate for you to have a forensic medical examination. This examination is carried out by a specially trained medical professional who may be able to collect evidence that could help the police to confirm the identity of the person who carried out the assault. This evidence may include bodily fluids or hair that belongs to the other person that has been transferred to you or your clothing.

## Self-referral to a SARCS

If you've been raped or sexually assaulted within the last 7 days and don't want to tell the police, or are unsure about telling them now, you can self-refer to a **SARCS**. This means that you don't need a GP or other healthcare professional to refer you to a **SARCS**, you can do this yourself.

If you self-refer, the staff will look after your immediate health and wellbeing needs. It may be appropriate for you to have a forensic medical examination. The examination will be carried out in the same way as it would if you tell the police.

The **SARCS** can collect certain forensic evidence and keep it for 26 months, in case you want to tell the police at a later date. If you choose not to tell the police, the evidence will be destroyed after 26 months. This self-referral service is for anyone aged 16 or over.

If you're under 16, you can find information about where you can go for help at **[nhsinform.scot/SARCS](https://nhsinform.scot/SARCS)**

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

There is a difference between a police report and a self-referral. As well as any forensic evidence obtained from a forensic medical examination, the police may be able to gather other evidence as part of their investigation (such as CCTV footage, crime scene evidence, bedding, or photographs on your mobile phone). These will not be collected if you self-refer to a **SARCS**.

### **How do I self-refer to a SARCS?**

You can phone a dedicated NHS telephone number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and speak to a specially trained healthcare professional who can help to arrange the care you might need.

**You can find more information about how to self-refer to a SARCS and the telephone number to call on the NHS inform website [nhsinform.scot/SARCS](https://nhsinform.scot/SARCS)**

### **What can I expect when I arrive at the SARCS?**

Whether you tell the police or self-refer, the staff are there to help provide any medical, emotional or practical support you might need. A specially trained nurse will be there to support you throughout your appointment. You will be treated with compassion, dignity and respect at all times.

## **What will happen after the examination?**

You will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have. Any follow up healthcare appointments or referrals to other services or support will be arranged for you.

If you self-refer to a **SARCS**, the staff will make sure you have somewhere safe to go when you leave. They will also support you to make a police report if that's what you decide to do.

## **If I self-refer to a SARCS, what will happen to any evidence collected?**

Any forensic evidence taken will be stored securely in the **SARCS** for 26 months from the day of your examination. During that time, you can decide whether or not you want to tell the police. Your evidence will not be reviewed or analysed unless you decide to report to the police.

You can also choose to have your evidence destroyed or for certain evidence (such as personal items or clothing) to be returned to you. After the 26 months, your evidence will have been safely destroyed, but this will not prevent you from being able to make a report to the police if you decide to do so.

You may wish to talk to someone from the Rape Crisis advocacy service about what reporting to the police would involve. They can support you through the process if you decide to go ahead. Contact details for Rape Crisis are at the end of this leaflet. There may be other local support services in your area that you can contact for support.

## **If I self-refer to a SARCS and then decide to tell the police, what will happen next?**

If you decide to make a police report within the 26-month period, you should tell the police about the examination so they can contact the **SARCS** you attended and request that any evidence is safely passed to them.

If the police have enough evidence to prove a crime has been committed, they will submit a report to the Crown Office and Procurator

Fiscal Service (COPFS). The COPFS will decide if there is enough evidence to prosecute the person. You will be contacted by the Victim Information and Advice Service, which is part of COPFS, who will provide you with information about the case. They can also tell you about any additional support that may be available to you.

## **Will anyone know if I self-refer to a SARCS?**

This is a confidential NHS service and the police and other agencies will not know unless you decide to tell them. In certain circumstances, a healthcare professional may need to tell them if you or others are at risk of further harm.

If you are being coerced, forced or pressured by someone else to have sex or engage in sexual activity, the staff at the **SARCS** can help you. They will not tell you what to do, but can support you to contact the police if you wish to report it, or can refer you to support organisations.

## **SUPPORT AND INFORMATION**

**NHS Inform**  
**nhsinform.scot/SARCS**

### **Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline**

Call: **08088 010302**

5pm to midnight, every night

Text: **07537 410 027**

[support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

**rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

### **Police Scotland**

In an emergency dial **999**

For non-emergencies dial **101**

**scotland.police.uk**

## **Victim Support Scotland**

Call: **0800 160 1985**

Mon – Fri 8am to 8pm

**victimsupport.scot**

## **Breathing Space**

Call: **0800 83 85 87**

Mon – Thur 6pm to 2am

Fri 6pm to Mon 6am

**breathingspace.scot**

## **Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline**

Call: **0800 027 1234**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**sdafmh.org.uk**

## **Childline**

Call: **0800 1111**

24 hours a day,

7 days a week

**childline.org.uk**

Information about other support services and organisations can be found at **nhsinform.scot/SARCS**

# THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **It's your choice.** You will not be rushed into making any decisions and are encouraged to ask questions before deciding to go ahead. You can ask to bring someone with you, such as a trusted friend or relative.
- **You are in control.** You can ask the healthcare professional providing your care to pause or stop at any time.
- **You should try to seek help as soon as possible after the assault.** A forensic medical examination is normally only carried out if the assault has happened within the last 7 days. Although in some circumstances, it may be helpful to have an examination after that time. If you're unsure about what to do, you should contact the telephone number at **nhsinform.scot/SARCS** to discuss the options available to you.
- **You're not alone.** If you have recently been through a traumatic experience such as rape or sexual assault, **SARCS** is here to help you.



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