

Rape

What is rape?

Rape is a felony crime in which a person is forced to have sexual intercourse without giving consent. Some states substitute the term "aggravated sexual assault" for "rape," and many states include homosexual rape, incest, and other sex offenses in the definition of rape. While most rapes are unreported, the number of cases reported in the U.S. more than doubled between 1970 and 1986. It is not actually known if the number of rapes has increased or if more victims have been willing to come forward. Shame, fear of revenge or rejection, and the trauma of a court trial are common reasons for failure to report a sexual offense. Rape is most often motivated by extreme anger toward the victim or a need to overpower the victim. The motive is rarely sexual and violence is not always involved. Forced sex is intended to abuse, humiliate, and dehumanize the victim. Fifty percent of all rapists are under the age of 25 and most rapists average ten rapes before they are caught. Studies indicate that rape occurs most frequently with someone the victim already knows. Drug and alcohol abuse are frequently related to sexual offenses.

What are the effects?

The effects of rape are both physical and psychological. Physical effects on the victim may include:

- injuries from beating or choking, such as bruises, scratches, cuts, and broken bones
- swelling around the genital area
- bruising around the vagina
- injury to the rectal-vaginal area (for example, tearing of the tissue that connects the anus to the vagina)
- sexually transmitted diseases (such as, herpes, gonorrhea, AIDS, and syphilis)
- possible pregnancy (in a regularly menstruating female).

Psychological effects on the victim may include:

- severe anxiety
- depression
- difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- dreaming about what happened
- inappropriate guilt feelings
- emotional numbness or irritability
- flashbacks
- nightmares
- extreme fear.

How is it treated?

If you are sexually assaulted, do not wash or douche. Call the police to report the incident, then go to a hospital. The doctor will give you a thorough physical exam, including a pelvic exam, to determine the extent of your injuries. The doctor will make special note of any cuts, bruises, or other injuries, especially in the genital area. To collect potential evidence to use against the attacker, the doctor will look for specimens such as patches of torn clothing, blood, and strands of hair from the attacker. These specimens can be tested against body fluid or skin samples from suspects. After your examination the doctor may recommend that you do the following:

- Seek professional crisis counseling.
- Take antibiotics or other medicine for sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, chlamydial infection, or pubic lice.
- Find out about the resources available to help you deal with the emotional and physical effects of sexual assault.
- Join a support group for rape victims.
- Take medications to prevent pregnancy.
- Seek counseling about your alternatives if pregnancy results.

Child victims need to be evaluated by a doctor immediately. It is generally recommended that the child see a special counselor trained to work with cases of abused children.

How long will the effects last?

The physical effects of rape can last from a day to a few months, depending on the extent of the injuries involved. The mental and emotional effects are less predictable. The effects may last a lifetime, but crisis counseling and rape support groups can help reduce long-term effects and help the victim cope with feelings of isolation, guilt, depression, or anxiety.

How can I take care of myself?

Schedule a follow-up visit so the doctor can make sure that any injuries are healing properly. The doctor will also want to make sure you are not developing any complications of rape. It is also important to get emotional and psychological support. Contact a hospital, social worker, or rape crisis center to find out about the resources available to you. You may benefit from a rape support group where you can share your feelings with others who have had a similar traumatic experience.

Do not isolate yourself. Allow family members to provide emotional support. There are family counseling programs for family members who need help dealing with their concerns and increasing their ability to provide emotional support. For child victims, find a counselor who specializes in working with child abuse and incest cases. This may be critical in reducing long-term emotional effects for the child.

What can be done to help prevent rape?

- Learn about characteristics or typical behavior patterns of potential attackers.
- Teach your children what to do if approached by a stranger, what behavior to look out for, and what places or situations to avoid (for example, alleys and other secluded areas).
- Educate yourself about aspects of your appearance and behavior that might make you vulnerable to attack.
- Learn self-defense techniques to help you defend yourself against an attacker.

If you have been sexually assaulted or raped there is help available. You did not deserve this attack and we want to offer you options to care for yourself. Please consider calling a trusted friend or one of the following resources for help:

Student Counseling and Resource Services: 702-9800

Student Care Center Nurse: 702-4156

Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline: 1-888-293-2080 (24-hours)

Walk-in to University of Chicago Hospitals Emergency Room - entrance on 58th Street - ask for Rape Advocate.

Notify your Resident Head or contact a Sexual Assault Dean-on-Call (834-HELP).

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