

Sexual Assault Investigations

601.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the investigation of sexual assaults. These guidelines will address some of the unique aspects of such cases and the effects that these crimes have on the victims.

Mandatory notifications requirements are addressed in the Child Abuse and Adult Abuse policies.

601.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Sexual assault - Any crime or attempted crime of a sexual nature, to include, but not limited to, offenses defined in Title 18, Article 3, Part 4 (Unlawful Sexual Behavior) of the Colorado Revised Statutes.

Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) - A multidisciplinary team generally comprised of advocates; law enforcement officers; forensic medical examiners, including sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs) if possible; forensic laboratory personnel; and prosecutors. The team is designed to coordinate a broad response to sexual assault victims.

601.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Louisville Police Department that its members, when responding to reports of sexual assaults, will strive to minimize the trauma experienced by the victims, and will aggressively investigate sexual assaults, pursue expeditious apprehension and conviction of perpetrators, and protect the safety of the victims and the community.

601.3 QUALIFIED INVESTIGATORS

Qualified investigators should be available for assignment of sexual assault investigations. These investigators should:

- a. Have specialized training in, and be familiar with, interview techniques and the medical and legal issues that are specific to sexual assault investigations.
- b. Conduct follow-up interviews and investigation.
- c. Present appropriate cases of alleged sexual assault to the prosecutor for review.
- d. Coordinate with other enforcement agencies, social service agencies and medical personnel as needed.
- e. Provide referrals to therapy services, victim advocates and support for the victim.
- f. Participate in or coordinate with SART or other multidisciplinary investigative teams as applicable.

601.4 REPORTING

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In all reported or suspected cases of sexual assault, a report should be written and assigned for follow-up investigation. This includes incidents in which the allegations appear unfounded or unsubstantiated.

601.5 VICTIM INTERVIEWS

The primary considerations in sexual assault investigations, which begin with the initial call to the Communications Center, should be the health and safety of the victim, the preservation of evidence, and preliminary interviews to determine if a crime has been committed and to attempt to identify the suspect.

Whenever possible, a member of SART or the multidisciplinary response team should be included in the initial victim interviews.

An in-depth follow-up interview should not be conducted until after the medical and forensic examinations are completed and the personal needs of the victim have been met (e.g., change of clothes, bathing). The follow-up interview may be delayed to the following day based upon the circumstances. Whenever practicable, the follow-up interview should be conducted by a qualified investigator.

No opinion of whether the case is unfounded shall be included in a report.

Victims should be notified if forensic medical evidence has been submitted to an accredited crime laboratory (CRS § 24-4.1-302.5).

Victims should be apprised of applicable victim's rights provisions, as outlined in the Victim and Witness Assistance Policy.

601.5.1 TRUTH VERIFICATION EXAMINATIONS

Members of the Louisville Police Department shall not ask or require a victim of a sex crime to submit to a truth verification examination as a condition for proceeding with a criminal investigation (34 USC § 10451; CRS § 18-3-407.5).

A truth verification examination shall only be conducted upon a victim with the victim's written informed consent that includes notice that he/she has the right to refuse to submit to the examination. In addition, the victim shall be informed orally with information about the potential use of the result of the examination (CRS § 18-3-407.5).

601.6 COLLECTION AND TESTING OF BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Whenever possible, a SART member should be involved in the collection of forensic evidence from the victim.

When the facts of the case indicate that collection of biological evidence is warranted, it should be collected regardless of how much time has elapsed since the reported assault. Forensic medical evidence shall be collected if the victim requests the collection (CRS § 24-33.5-113; 8 CCR 1507-29).

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If a drug-facilitated sexual assault is suspected, urine and blood samples should be collected from the victim as soon as practicable.

Subject to requirements set forth in this policy, biological evidence from all sexual assault cases, including cases where the suspect is known by the victim, should be submitted for testing.

Victims who choose not to assist with an investigation, do not desire that the matter be investigated or wish to remain anonymous may still consent to the collection of evidence under their control. In these circumstances, the evidence should be collected and stored appropriately.

No Louisville Police Department member shall ask or require a sex crime victim to participate or cooperate in an investigation as a condition of receiving a forensic medical examination (CRS § 18-3-407.5).

601.6.1 COLLECTION AND TESTING REQUIREMENTS

Members investigating sexual assaults or handling related evidence are required to do the following (CRS § 24-33.5-113; 8 CCR 1507-29):

- a. Obtain the victim's written consent prior to collection of any forensic medical evidence, using the form required by the Department of Public Safety (DPS).
- b. Submit evidence to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation or an accredited crime laboratory within 21 days, unless the victim withdraws consent.
- c. Retrieve medical forensic evidence when contacted by a medical facility for appropriate retention (CRS § 18-3-407.5).
- d. Participate in the DPS statewide sexual assault evidence collection kit system for monitoring the status and location of the victim's sexual assault kit as required by CRS § 24-33.5-113.5.

Forensic evidence associated with an anonymous report made pursuant to CRS § 12-240-139 shall not be submitted to a laboratory for testing (CRS § 18-3-407.5).

Additional guidance regarding evidence retention and destruction is found in the Property and Evidence Policy.

601.6.2 DNA TEST RESULTS

Members investigating sexual assault cases should notify victims of any DNA test results as soon as reasonably practicable (CRS § 24-4.1-302.5).

A SART member should be consulted regarding the best way to deliver biological testing results to a victim so as to minimize victim trauma, especially in cases where there has been a significant delay in getting biological testing results (e.g., delays in testing the evidence or delayed DNA databank hits). Members should make reasonable efforts to assist the victim by providing available information on local assistance programs and organizations as provided in the Victim and Witness Assistance Policy.

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Members investigating sexual assaults cases should ensure that DNA results are entered into databases when appropriate and as soon as practicable.

601.7 DISPOSITION OF CASES

If the assigned investigator has reason to believe the case is without merit, the case may be classified as unfounded only upon review and approval of the Detective Section supervisor.

Classification of a sexual assault as unfounded requires the Detective Section supervisor to determine that the facts have significant irregularities with reported information and that the incident could not have happened as it was reported. When a victim has recanted the victim's original statement, there must be corroborating evidence that the allegations were false or baseless (i.e., no crime occurred) before the case should be determined as unfounded.

The assigned investigator should inform the victim of any change in status of the case, including cases that are closed or reopened (CRS § 24-4.1-302.5).

601.7.1 CONSULTATION

Officers are expected to consult with a Sex Crimes Deputy from the 20th Judicial District Attorney's Office when considering, and before making, a probable cause arrest for a sex or sex related crime (for felony cases, for both adults and juveniles. Officers may also consult with a Sex Crimes Deputy regarding probable cause arrests on misdemeanor cases, especially if there is the possibility of felony conduct.

601.8 CASE REVIEW

The Detective Section supervisor should ensure case dispositions are reviewed on a periodic basis, at least annually, using an identified group that is independent of the investigation process. The reviews should include an analysis of:

- Case dispositions.
- Decisions to collect biological evidence.
- Submissions of biological evidence for lab testing.

The SART or multidisciplinary response team and/or victim advocates should be considered for involvement in this audit. Summary reports on these reviews should be forwarded through the chain of command to the Chief of Police.

601.9 RELEASING INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

In cases where the perpetrator is not known to the victim, and especially if there are multiple crimes where more than one appear to be related, consideration should be given to releasing information to the public whenever there is a reasonable likelihood that doing so may result in developing helpful investigative leads. The Detective Section supervisor should weigh the risk of alerting the suspect to the investigation with the need to protect the victim and the public, and to prevent more crimes.

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601.10 TRAINING

Subject to available resources, periodic training should be provided to:

1. Members who are first responders. Training should include:
 1. Initial response to sexual assaults.
 2. Legal issues.
 3. Victim advocacy.
 4. Victim's response to trauma.
2. Qualified investigators, who should receive advanced training on additional topics. Advanced training should include:
 1. Interviewing sexual assault victims.
 2. SART or multidisciplinary response team.
 3. Medical and legal aspects of sexual assault investigations.
 4. Serial crimes investigations.
 5. Use of community and other federal and state investigative resources, such as the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP).
 6. Techniques for communicating with victims to minimize trauma.