

## Information about the Check My Kit Project

When a victim reports a sexual assault and provides sexual assault forensic evidence at the hospital, it has not always been tested for DNA evidence. A number of sexual assault kits/evidence was not tested after the initial report. It was initially believed to be not necessary, however nationally and locally, best practices around testing of kits has changed. All evidence/kits are now being tested. As testing evidence is a process, it will take time, up to several years, before all evidence/kits are tested. Below are some common questions to help understand the process and important information.

### TERMS TO KNOW

Advocate – First responders for victims of domestic violence/sexual assault at area hospitals and from law enforcement reports. Advocates are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

CODIS – CODIS stands for Combined DNA Index System. It is a state and national database that houses DNA on individuals related to crimes.

Sexual Assault Kit (SAK) – This is evidence collected by a medical provider after a sexual assault. It typically includes evidence from the areas of the victim's body that were part of the sexual assault and that may have the suspects sperm or DNA on it. It may also include clothing the victim was wearing and other items.

Women's Center for Advancement (WCA) – A go-to place for anyone in the Omaha area who is experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. The WCA assures that no victim will ever walk alone in their journey and will serve as a liaison with the Omaha Police Department as information on your sexual assault becomes available.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **Why were the kits not tested before?**

There may be many reasons why a sexual assault kit was not tested previously, such as DNA not being needed for the investigation or the cost of testing the kit locally.

#### **What has changed? Why was it tested now?**

New national best practices for testing this evidence have been created. The Omaha Police Department and Douglas County are working to implement these new best practices. This means that all kits will be tested.

One of the reasons it is important to test all kits is that it may be possible for suspect DNA to be entered into state or national DNA databases (CODIS). This can potentially provide leads on additional cases or help identify suspects who have committed multiple sexual assaults.

#### **Why is having the information in CODIS important?**

Forensic scientists at the Nebraska State Crime Lab will work to obtain a DNA profile of the assailant(s) from the samples collected in the SAK. If a DNA profile is obtained, the laboratory can submit that profile for searching against state and national DNA databases using CODIS. This may be helpful in a number of ways, including:

1. Identifying a suspect (if previously unknown);
2. Linking DNA profiles between crimes to find serial rapists; and
3. Eliminating suspects who did not commit the sexual assault.

In addition, if this person commits another sexual assault, law enforcement may be able to identify the person by their DNA in the system.

**What happens once the sexual assault kit has been tested?**

Victims will be contacted if the evidence reveals new information for the investigation. An advocate from the Women's Center for Advancement (WCA) will be assigned to provide support and information. WCA will discuss possible next steps for speaking with law enforcement.

If desired, a law enforcement investigator will contact and schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss the results of the test and investigation options. The Omaha Police Department has specific investigators for sexual assault cases that are specially trained to handle these cases and work with victims. They will be hiring additional specialized investigators for this project.

**Will it turn into a law enforcement investigation?**

Much of that will depend on the victim. They should discuss their wishes about if or how their case proceeds with the investigator as well as any concerns they have.

Law enforcement will honor requests from the victim to not move forward with investigating their case. If they change their mind later, they can contact the Women's Center for Advancement advocate they spoke with or the law enforcement agency directly.

**What if you had a sexual assault kit/evidence collected and don't want to wait to be contacted?**

If you would like to know the status of a sexual assault kit/evidence you had collected, OR if you would like to opt out of having your kit/evidence tested please use one of the below contacts.

*If you are calling about a sexual assault case and the victim is under the age of 16, you MUST call the Omaha Police Department contact number. They will connect you with an advocate from Project Harmony.*

- Contact the Omaha Police Department Sexual Assault Division  
Phone: 402-444-5636  
Email: [OPD.CVSA@CityOfOmaha.org](mailto:OPD.CVSA@CityOfOmaha.org)

Law enforcement will provide you information on your kit/evidence. If you do not wish for your evidence to be tested, you will be provided information on how to opt out. They will also follow-up once evidence is tested with the evidence results and the options moving forward in the investigation.

*OR*

- Contact the Women's Center for Advancement  
24-Hour Hotline: 402-345-7273  
Email: [CheckMyKit@WCAOmaha.org](mailto:CheckMyKit@WCAOmaha.org)

An advocate will talk through your options, share your wishes with law enforcement and provide information back to you. *Callers should identify that they are calling about the Check My Kit Project.*

**If I call law enforcement, can I still decide after evidence is tested not to participate in the investigation?**

Yes. Law enforcement will honor your request for the investigation to not move forward. If you change your mind at a later time, you can call the investigator back to discuss moving forward.