



Crime Lab Submissions in Sexual Assault Cases

TO: Alaska Law Enforcement
FROM: David Kanaris, Chief, Forensic Laboratories
DATE: April 16, 2020

SUMMARY: *Effective immediately, the initial evidence submission to the crime lab in a sexual assault investigation should only include the following items:*

- *Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit(s) from both victims and suspects*
- *Required reference buccal samples from victims, suspects and consent partners*
- *Used condoms or other body swabs collected from victims and suspects outside of a kit*

Sexual Assault Kits are the best source for forensic evidence. Significant resources [time and shipping costs] are expended sending items (bedding, clothing, etc.) to the laboratory that ultimately do not end up being tested because needed results are obtained from the kit.

If you are submitting evidence in a case where a sexual assault kit was not collected, contact the laboratory to discuss what items should be submitted.

Law enforcement officers should continue to collect all available forensic evidence in sexual assault cases, as each case is different and items in addition to the kit, may ultimately require testing.

EXPLANATION:

The Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory continuously seeks to improve both its internal processes as well as those that interface with our stakeholders. In recent years, significant changes have been implemented with regards to the collection, testing and storage of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits (SAKs).

The Alaska crime laboratory is revamping its workflow to meet the new requirements of HB49, which became effective January 1st of this year. The new workflow is designed to provide results to law enforcement in a more timely manner by starting with the evidence most likely to provide useable information (kits, condoms, and body swabs). Most sexual assault cases will only have the SAK(s) processed during the initial testing phase as it is most likely to be the only evidence needed to pursue the investigation or identify a suspect. The laboratory will report the results of the kit, and then agencies will have the opportunity to request testing of additional items on a case by case basis if it is necessary to strengthen the prosecution's case or there is inadequate evidence found in the SAK

Currently, a number of law enforcement agencies submit all the evidence that has been collected for DNA testing up front. Many of these items end up being returned to the submitting agency, not having been tested. There is a significant cost incurred by both the submitting agency and the laboratory in terms of shipping and staff time to package evidence and maintain a proper chain of custody. ***Therefore, effective immediately, we are asking that the initial laboratory submittal in a sexual assault investigation only include the following items:***

- ***Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit(s) from both victims and suspects***
- ***Required reference buccal samples from victims, suspects and consent partners***
- ***Used condoms or other body swabs collected from victims and suspects outside of a kit***

The laboratory will assess the information provided on the Request for Laboratory Services form and reach out to the case officer when submission of additional evidence is appropriate prior to testing beginning. For the laboratory to make the most informed decisions, it is essential that the form be completed with the case summary and all requested information on the supplemental DNA page. This includes the field where the agency can list other items available for testing.

Additionally, to facilitate the laboratory's transition to a new LIMS (Laboratory Information Management System), we will be returning items such as clothing and bedding in a number of cases where the analysis of the sexual assault kit is still pending. Once testing of the kit is completed, the laboratory will report the results of the kit and communicate to agencies that if additional evidence was collected, they will have the opportunity to request testing of additional items on a case by case basis. We understand that this may require resubmission of items that we recently returned. However, the number of cases where evidence needs to be resubmitted is expected to be quite small. Any questions with regards to this change can be directed to Michelle Collins (907-269-5620 or michelle.collins@alaska.gov) or Jennifer Foster (907-269-4074 or jennifer.foster@alaska.gov), the Forensic Biology Supervisors at the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory.

To obtain kits, please send an e-mail to dps.supply.orders@alaska.gov.