



Notifier FAQs

NC SAKI: Victim Notification Toolkit

Included on this page are a list of FAQs, tips for self-care, resources to assist with victim notification, and a collection of SAKI webinars and tools for additional information.

FAQs

1. *How many unsubmitted sexual assault kits are there in North Carolina?*

Over 15,000.

2. *Are all 15,000 kits being tested?*

It is unclear how many kits will be tested through the SAKI project. At this time, North Carolina will not be testing the following kits: 1) those submitted anonymously (unreported); 2) those confirmed as unfounded after a comprehensive case review by the law enforcement agency and complete review by the multidisciplinary team; and 3) those in which a criminal prosecution has resulted in conviction, the convicted person does not seek DNA testing, *and* the convicted person's DNA profile is already in CODIS.

3. *What are the different types of findings the lab can report after testing kits, and what do they mean?*

The lab will be testing the kits to determine if there was DNA present, and if so, if the suspect's DNA is in the CODIS database. CODIS (Combined DNA Index System), is the national DNA computer database run by the FBI that allows for federal, state, and local forensic labs to exchange and compare DNA profiles electronically, thereby linking serial violent crimes to each other and to known offenders.

FINDINGS*

1) No DNA present

2) DNA present, CODIS uploaded, no CODIS hit (yet)

The DNA profile does not match a DNA profile in CODIS, but will stay in CODIS and be continuously compared to DNA profiles added later.

3) DNA present, CODIS uploaded, and CODIS hit

When a DNA profile from evidence in an unsolved case matches the DNA profile from a convicted offender or an arrestee. Note: a “hit” may or may not include the suspects name. A “hit” can provide an investigative lead to help solve an unsolved case.

**These findings do not necessarily determine the investigative path of the case. Even if there is no DNA present, in relooking at the case, law enforcement may want to further investigate. Similarly, even if there is a CODIS hit, if the survivor does not want to move forward with an investigation, law enforcement may choose to close the case.*

4. *What reasons can I give a survivor for why their kit took so long to process?*

Several factors may have impacted why some sexual assault kits were not submitted for testing. These may include the lack of advances in DNA testing methods or technology, lack of systems for tracking evidence, outdated investigative methods or protocols, limited funds and personnel for testing, or lack of training and/or education about the value of sexual assault kit testing. Also, the sexual assault kit may not have been tested if it was collected before CODIS was created and when DNA was only tested if a suspect was identified.

5. *Which survivors can access victim’s compensation funds?*

Unfortunately, those with cold cases, such as victims who are part of the rape kit backlog, are NOT eligible for victim’s compensation funds. Current cases however are eligible for this funding.

6. *What is the Survivor Act?*

On September 19, 2019, Attorney General Josh Stein, joined by bill sponsors Reps. Carson Smith and Billy Richardson announced that Gov. Roy Cooper signed into law the Standing Up for Rape Victims Act, or Survivor Act, which provides \$6 million to test sexual assault kits and requires local law enforcement agencies to submit sexual assault kits for testing within 45 days of the kit’s collection. Doing so will deliver justice to more victims and prevent backlogs from occurring in the future. For more detailed information, please see the [Survivor Act Fact Sheet](#).

7. *What are some things I can do to prepare for a victim notification?*

- ✓ Prepare for notification to be a *process*, not just a “one-time” event. This means making sure you are available to talk and meet soon after the survivor has been notified.

- ✓ Take necessary steps for your own **self-care**: While it will be traumatic for the survivor, it can also be very difficult to be the notifier. Make sure you have a confidential support person to debrief with after the notification is made. See the self-care resources section below for additional support.
- ✓ Make sure you have done a thorough **background check** on the survivor so that you can provide them the most relevant resources, and also to ensure their safety. For example, if the perpetrator was their current marital partner, be sure you have DV resources in place, and also that the notification is made when the perpetrator is not with them. To get started, please see the list of suggested resources.
- ✓ For more information, see the *Victim Notification Checklist*

8. *What is the Statute of Limitations (SOL) for reporting rape/sexual offense cases in NC?*

There is no statute of limitations for these crimes. In other words, no matter how much time has passed, these cases can still be reported to law enforcement.

9. *What resources can I give survivors who have a kit as part of the backlog?*

Every survivor should be given a customized list of resources based on their needs. In general, it is a good rule to provide no more than 3-5 resources, and to clearly explain the value of each one. Too many resources can be overwhelming, making it less likely that a survivor would reach out to them. Here is a list of resources to get you started,

10. *Who can I contact if I have questions or need help and/or support throughout this process?*

You can contact the NC SAKI Site Coordinator at the NC State Crime Lab, Bill Hart (919) 582-8880, or bhart@ncdoj.gov, for general information about SAKI, for help in securing information about a kit, to request resources or to find out where to get help.

Resources

Self-care

Practicing self-care is vital for advocates. The following links can help you through the victim notification process.

- 1) [5-Minute Stress Reliever Activity – Psychology Today](#)

A quick mindfulness exercise to promote relaxation and help ground yourself during busy & stressful days.

2) [Free Guided Mindfulness Basics - Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA](#)

This site provides FREE guided audio sessions on the basics of mindfulness practices.

3) [Resilience and Victim Service Providers- National Center for Victims of Crime](#)

As a victim service provider, you may often be exposed to intense human suffering. This resource explores the importance of *resilience* (the power to cope with diversity and adapt to challenges or change), as it relates to being a victim service provider.

4) [Top 12 Self-Care Tips to Reduce Compassion Fatigue](#)

Compassion fatigue (deep emotional and physical exhaustion by those in helping roles), can strike the most caring and dedicated advocates, nurses, social workers, and personal support workers alike. These changes can affect both their personal and professional lives with symptoms such as difficulty concentrating, intrusive imagery, loss of hope, exhaustion and irritability. It can also lead to profound shifts in the way helpers view the world and their loved ones. Read this article to get tips on how to proactively reduce your likelihood of developing compassion fatigue.

5) [Vicarious Trauma- Joyful Heart Foundation](#)

Family, friends, and colleagues of people who have experienced abuse can struggle with distressing feelings, shock, and grief. The professionals who routinely come in contact with trauma and suffering as part of their work lives are also affected. *Vicarious trauma* happens when we accumulate and carry the stories of trauma—including images, sounds, and resonant details—we have heard, which then come to inform our worldview. This website provides a wealth of information about vicarious trauma and how to know the signs.

Victim Notification Foundation Article

[Navigating Notification and Re-Engaging Survivors - The Joyful Heart Foundation](#)

A guide to re-engaging sexual assault survivors affected by the untested rape kit backlog. This groundbreaking report will help jurisdictions working to eliminate their backlogs of untested rape kits to create survivor-centered, trauma-informed policies and protocols for victim notification. (2016)

Webinars and Resources

The Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) Training and Technical Assistance website offers a variety of tools and webinars to provide guidance and training on all SAKI-related issues including victim notification and trauma-informed response. Below is a list of our recommendations for getting started:

1) [3-Part Series: The Neurobiology of Sexual Assault Trauma Webinar by Dr. Campbell](#)

Dr. Rebecca Campbell, professor of psychology at Michigan State University and member of the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Training and Technical Assistance team, presents an overview of the neurobiology of sexual assault trauma.

2) [Strategies for Victim Notification Webinar](#)

RAINN & the Joyful Heart Foundation teamed up for this SAKI TTA webinar. In “Strategies for Victim Notification”, 2 policy experts explore best practices for victim-centered, trauma-informed notification policies & procedures.

3) [DNA 101 for Law Enforcement Agencies](#)

This webinar provides an introduction to forensic DNA testing and reporting.

4) [Victim Notification: Safety and Privacy Planning](#)

Facilitated by Lauren DeVries, Crime Victim Advocate at the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, this webinar provides invaluable resources for those conducting victim notifications.

5) [Advocacy Roles & Resources](#)

Cold case sexual assault victims being reengaged in the criminal justice system can have complex, difficult emotions after being notified about renewed activity in their case. Victim advocates provide valuable support to sexual assault victims, which benefits victims and the criminal justice process. Victim advocate resources help victims on their path to recovery and their interactions with the criminal justice system to ensure a positive experience with law enforcement and prosecutors. This link provides 9 tools to help you navigate this process.

For a complete listing of all SAKI webinars and tools you may visit the SAKI TTA Webinar page here:

⇒ [SAKI Training and Technical Assistance \(TTA\) Webinar Listing](#)

⇒ [SAKI Toolkit Training Materials](#)

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