

SEXUAL ASSAULT OVERSEAS

Sexual Assault Overseas

Sexual assault is a traumatic experience for anyone, particularly when travelling overseas and away from home. It can also be a distressing experience for families and friends. This publication provides advice on how to avoid becoming a victim of sexual assault, and advice to victims of sexual assault and their families if it does happen while overseas.

Sexual assault can happen anywhere to anyone. Sexual assault is an act of violence which violates a person's sense of safety and control and can leave them feeling powerless and dishonoured.

Perpetrators of sexual assault may use drugs, threats, power, force and manipulation to attempt to control another person's body, senses and emotions.

Assaults can happen to both men and women when travelling overseas, and in most cases, the perpetrator is a stranger.

Tips to avoid becoming a victim of sexual assault

- Be aware of your surroundings and if you feel uncomfortable, leave.
- Avoid walking alone or through poorly lit areas at night.
- Do not leave your drink unattended in public spaces.
- If any doors or windows to your accommodation are broken, do not enter. Instead contact the police.
- Avoid going into back rooms of shops where you cannot see the street.
- Be cautious of unsolicited invitations from strangers.
- In some countries, conservative standards of dress and behaviour can apply. Do your research before you travel and dress accordingly.
- If attacked, scream to draw attention.

What to do if you're assaulted

First, try to move to a safe location.

If possible, find someone you know and trust to support you. This will be a difficult time and you need to be in control of decisions that are made relating to the assault. Being sexually assaulted can cause people to feel powerless, so it's essential that you have support and can make decisions that are right for you. Remember, you are in control of the response.

Seek immediate medical assistance. Medical clinics and hospitals generally have special kits to undertake necessary testing, as you may have suffered injuries or have been exposed to other risks, such as sexually transmissible infections or pregnancy. Doctors can offer advice, testing, treatment and assistance with emergency contraception. In particular, ask about post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV/AIDS. An early medical examination may provide important evidence if you decide to report the assault to police. In most countries, medical staff may also assist you to contact police or other authorities.

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If you are considering filing a police report, the medical evidence is required to be taken within 72 hours after the assault. The evidence is most effectively collected if you go straight to the hospital after an assault without bathing, changing clothes or washing or discarding anything that could potentially be used as evidence.

Consider contacting a sexual assault service or crisis line to discuss what happened. If you're not sure what services may be available, contact the nearest Australian embassy, high commission or consulate for assistance. Contact details are available at dfat.gov.au/missions.

The embassy, high commission or consulate may be able to assist you with other information in relation to your safety, medical facilities, legal concerns and the steps associated with reporting the assault in your location. You can also contact the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra from anywhere in the world on **+61 2 6261 3305**. If you're in need of counselling, the centre can transfer you to an Australian sexual assault counselling service or a Lifeline telephone crisis supporter.

Decide whether to report the assault to the police. Sexual assault is a crime and support options are available through police and the legal system. Once you have reported the crime, police will undertake an investigation which could take some period of time to be completed. We recommend that you appoint a lawyer at this point to assist them with the ongoing case. Legal representation can continue to keep a case active. In the event that the perpetrator is caught and charged, in many countries the victim is required to be present in court for the case to be heard. This can be very stressful and also costly. If you choose not to return for the court hearing, in all likelihood, the case could be dropped and no charges laid.

You should be aware that in some countries sex outside of marriage is illegal. It is possible that victims of sexual assault may face criminal prosecution rather than being considered the victim of a crime. There have been cases where sexual assault victims have been imprisoned after reporting an incident to local police or upon seeking medical assistance. If you have any doubts about possible legal repercussions, we strongly advise that you contact the nearest Australian embassy, high commission or consulate or DFAT's 24 hour Consular Emergency Centre as quickly as possible to obtain relevant information on these issues and guidance on what support services may be available. Consular officers cannot provide legal or medical advice but can provide lists of English-speaking service providers who may be able to assist victims in this process.

Consider undergoing counselling with a supportive and experienced counsellor. Counselling can provide you with a safe, private place to talk with someone who will listen. It's not uncommon for people to try a few counsellors before they find someone with whom they feel comfortable.

Sexual assault is never the victim's fault. Try not to blame yourself. The perpetrator is the only one responsible for the assault. No one deserves to be raped or assaulted.

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How can family and friends help?

- Always believe victims of sexual assault and reassure them it's not their fault.
- Try to offer them a safe environment.
- Don't blame the victim.
- Don't push the victim to make quick decisions. Let them decide the pace in which they want to talk about the experience. It takes time to open up, even to family members, after a traumatic experience. Listen, be patient and supportive.

How do Australian consular staff provide support?

Australian consular staff can:

- support you in seeking medical assistance and reporting the crime to the police
- contact relatives or friends (we will not contact anyone without your consent)
- provide a list of doctors and lawyers and explain legal processes in general terms
- contact or provide a list of counselling services, locally (if available) or in Australia
- provide a Travellers Emergency Loan (emergency access to funds) if required
- help you to find accommodation, arrange flights home and contact your travel insurer.

Important things to consider

- Consular staff cannot make decisions for victims but, as they are aware of local conditions, they should be able to provide you with information and help you to examine your options.
- Consular staff cannot force local authorities to act when they are unwilling to do so but can make representations on a victim's behalf where appropriate.
- Consular staff cannot represent a victim at a trial. Only a lawyer can provide this service and should have access to information held by the magistrate concerning the case.
- In many countries, if the case goes to trial, local law may require a victim to return to the country to give evidence in person
- Depending on local regulations and work priorities, consular staff may attend judicial proceedings as an observer to emphasise the Australian Government's interest in the case.

The 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre (CEC) in Canberra can be contacted for assistance from anywhere in the world on **+61 2 6261 3305** or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia).

Not all countries have an Australian diplomatic or consular post, but there is usually one in the region. Informal arrangements also exist with other consular services, which can lend assistance to Australians in need.

The *Consular Services Charter* sets out the standards of service all Australians can expect to receive from consular staff, including what they can and cannot do, and is available at smartraveller.gov.au.

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Getting help

Getting help overseas

You can contact the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra on +61 2 6261 3305 from anywhere in the world. If you're in need of counselling, the centre can transfer you to an Australian sexual assault counselling service or a Lifeline telephone crisis supporter.

Getting help in Australia

In Australia, rape counselling services can provide assistance to victims of sexual assault. Trained and qualified staff will handle your call and provide you with useful information and support.

National	1800RESPECT	1800 737 732
Australian Capital Territory	Canberra Rape Crisis Centre	02 6247 2525
New South Wales	NSW Rape Crisis Centre	1800 424 017
Northern Territory	Crisis Line	1800 019 116
	Sexual Assault Referral Centre	08 8922 7156 (Darwin)
		08 8951 5880 (Alice Springs)
Queensland	Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline	1800 010 120
South Australia	Yarrow Place Rape and Sexual Assault Service	1800 817 421
Tasmania	Sexual Assault Support Service	03 6231 1817
	Centre Against Sexual Assault	03 6431 9711 (north-west)
Victoria	Centres Against Sexual Assault Crisis Line	1800 806 292
Western Australia	Sexual Assault Resource Centre	1800 199 888

While every care has been taken in preparing this information, neither the Australian Government nor its agents or employees, including any member of Australia's diplomatic and consular staff abroad, can accept liability for any injury, loss or damage arising in respect of any statement contained herein.

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Information for travellers and travel advisories are available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Smartraveller website smartraveller.gov.au. May 2014