



COVID-19 Pandemic & SARCS:

A guide for the Police

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Overview

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it is important that face to face contact between people is reduced as much as possible. SARCs are likely to have altered their practice in response.

As this is a rapidly changing situation, please make sure that you have seen the latest relevant documents. The Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine has produced a raft of COVID-19 guidance documents. They are freely available to all at <https://fflm.ac.uk/resources/covid-19>.

The main SARC changes are:

1. SARC will undertake telephone screening for risk of COVID-19 of all potential SARC visitors (clients, their supporters, police officers etc.)
 2. SARC will use a flowchart to assist with decision making about which clients are to be seen at SARC face to face and which clients can be managed by the phone/videoconferencing. The OIC's knowledge of the case will be valuable in this process. Good timely communication will be key to help successfully manage cases between the organisations. The decision to request self-swabbing should be as a result of a joint discussion between the Forensic Clinician, the Police and the complainant, taking into consideration the results of the screening questions and the circumstances of the particular case. Your local Crime Scene Investigation unit may also need to be involved.
 3. In all cases, SARCs should be gathering as much information as possible by phone (or videoconference) from the police and client. The aim is to keep face to face contact as minimal as possible whilst still remaining thorough, safe and sensitive to the needs of clients.
 4. Historical child sexual abuse cases. Please continue to make referrals as usual. The SARC will triage and make arrangements on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the forensic, medical, psychological and safeguarding needs of each child.
- The usual processes for having a case seen at SARC may have altered. Please check with your local SARC.
 - The OIC is likely to have more telephone contact with the SARC.
 - The Forensic Clinician is likely to want to speak to the client prior to them attending SARC (if they attend SARC at all). Please do not give out mobile telephone numbers of SARC staff to clients unless given permission by the staff to do so.
 - Arrangements may be made with the OIC for a client to "self-swab" some forensic samples rather than attend SARC. There is a template step-by-step guidance on this as well as patient information leaflets available at <https://fflm.ac.uk/resources/covid-19>. Check with the SARC to see if they are using anything different. As self-swabbing is not ideal in terms of evidence gathering, this should only be done if it is considered absolutely necessary. In these circumstances the advice from the forensic scientists is to seize wherever possible additional sources of evidence such as underwear, sanitary wear, bedding etc.

Domestic Abuse & Child Abuse

- It is likely that the rates of domestic abuse and child abuse will increase as families are in lockdown.
- Be mindful that this is the case.
- Be aware that a victim may not be able to make a disclosure if they fear being overheard or fearful that they will remain in the dwelling with the perpetrator.
- Look out for subtle signs, be curious, trust your instincts and explore further if things don't seem right.

Police & PPE & SARC

- Refer to Force Gold Group for your Force Guidance.
- The police should also be minimising face to face contact with others wherever possible.
- Control Room Operators as well as other Police Officers should screen for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 (a NEW continuous cough OR a high temperature of 37.8 degrees centigrade or higher)
- Remember that people can be infectious BEFORE they develop symptoms.

Implications for Police

- The documents that SARCs are likely to working to can be found at <https://fflm.ac.uk/resources/covid-19>. They are updated frequently so please check the website.



- For clients going to SARC, an assessment should be made as to whether the client can make their own safe travel arrangements or whether police transport is necessary. If travel with the police is unavoidable, police and client should wear face masks.
- The police vehicle should be decontaminated afterwards and before it is used by anyone else.

samples. Therefore, samples should be stored in a manner that minimises future risk. Any handling of the bags should be done using double gloves and followed by careful cleaning

Early Evidence Kits

- The risk of Coronavirus transmission increases with close contact and the main route is by droplet (coughing, sneezing).
- Buccal DNA samples –consider NOT taking these samples during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Mouth EEK samples. Unless there has been a clear history or strong suspicion of oral assault then consider NOT taking these samples during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Where these samples are considered necessary, then wherever possible get the client to take their own samples.
 - This should be done under the direct supervision of the police officer (or CSI)
 - The officer should be mindful of social distancing
 - The paperwork should reflect that the samples were self-taken and the steps taken to ensure they were taken correctly.
 - The paperwork for all samples should highlight that they were taken during the COVID-19 pandemic to warn any person handling the samples at a later date of their potential infectious nature.

Produced on behalf of the FFLM and NPCC by
Dr Catherine White and DCC Sarah Crew

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forensic.medicine@fflm.ac.uk

Handling Forensic Samples

- Treat all forensic samples as a biological hazard.
- All samples taken during the pandemic should be labelled with COVID-19 risk
- The police officer should carefully wash their hands, ideally with soap and water or alcohol gel if soap not available, after handling the sample bags.
- Evidence shows that COVID-19 appears to live for 72 hours on plastic, 48 hours on stainless steel and 24 hours on cardboard.
(<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2004973>)
- Therefore samples requiring freezing should be handled with care and frozen as soon as possible.
- Coronavirus is not destroyed by freezing, therefore the risk of infection remains with frozen