

How long will it last?

While an hour is set aside for each child's appointment, the actual physical examination will usually only take up a small part of that hour.

The physical examination, including a genital examination, might take as long as 5-10 minutes. The rest of the time is spent talking with the child and their support person(s), and answering any questions they may have.

Sometimes appointments may take longer than an hour if there are complex issues to be discussed. The physical examination will still only take up a small part of the appointment.

What will happen during the medical assessment?

After introductions and explanations about the assessment, the doctor will discuss matters related to consent for medical procedures and record the child's story. They will then assess the child's health, development and wellbeing. Other childhood illnesses, accidents and injuries will be discussed.

Any signs of injury will be well documented and treated. Additional tests and photographic documentation of injuries are sometimes recommended. Referral to other paediatric services will occur if appropriate. A medical report will be prepared.

When child sexual abuse or assault is suspected, the doctor usually examines the child's genital area with the aid of a colposcope (which is like binoculars with a bright light). In most cases, the doctor simply looks at the genital region but does not take swabs or do anything else.

It is **not** the sort of examination that gynaecologists provide to adult women.

VFPMS clinic locations and contact details

VFPMS clinic at The Royal Children's Hospital

Specialist Clinic C
Level 1, East Building
50 Flemington Road, Parkville Victoria 3052
Clinic telephone: (03) 9345 4299
Administration telephone: (03) 9345 9075
24-hour telephone: 1300 66 11 42
Fax: (03) 9345 4105
Email: enquiries@vfpms.org.au

VFPMS clinic at Monash Medical Centre

The Angela Taylor Unit
Level 2, Main Building
246 Clayton Road, Clayton Victoria 3168
Clinic telephone: (03) 9594 2155
Fax: (03) 9594 6328

Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
50 Flemington Road Parkville
Victoria 3052 Australia
TELEPHONE +61 3 9345 5522
www.rch.org.au



Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service (VFPMS)

Information for parents and carers



What does VFPMS do?

When someone becomes concerned that a child might have been abused, neglected or assaulted, it is often helpful for that child to have a medical assessment of his/her injury, symptoms and signs. The children's doctors at VFPMS assess injuries to determine, whenever possible, the cause of those injuries. At the same time, the child's health, growth, development, safety, wellbeing and behaviour are evaluated. This evaluation involves talking about the child's life and circumstances, the possible reasons for the injury and the child being examined. Sometimes medical tests and X-rays are recommended.

A medical report is usually provided to police and Child Protection (DHS) when there are significant ongoing concerns about abuse, neglect or assault.

Why should a child be offered a medical assessment by a children's doctor from VFPMS?

Medical examinations can be very reassuring for a child and their family. Often fears can be dispelled.

The child and their support person(s) will have a chance to talk with the doctor about symptoms or injuries (if any) that the child may have.

Medical assessments provide an opportunity to determine what the child might need to promote their health, growth, development and psychological wellbeing.

How can I organise a medical assessment and examination at VFPMS?

There are a few ways to obtain an appointment for a VFPMS medical assessment and examination for a child:

- Child Protection practitioners and police can telephone VFPMS to book an appointment
- A doctor can refer a child to VFPMS

How do I contact VFPMS?

VFPMS provides a 24-hour service.

During business hours (9.00am – 5.00pm on weekdays), telephone the VFPMS nurse manager for all appointment enquires:

- Statewide in Victoria 1300 66 11 42
- VFPMS clinic at The Royal Children's Hospital (03) 9345 4299
- VFPMS clinic at Monash Medical Centre (03) 9594 2155

For emergency after hours medical examinations (during evenings, public holidays and weekends) call **1300 66 11 42**.

Clinic locations and further contact information can be found on the back of this brochure.

Why would a child need to be seen after hours?

Children are seen after hours in order to collect forensic evidence or when urgent medical care is needed.

Most children are seen at 'next available' appointments during business hours.

Can the medical examination tell us if abuse or assault has occurred?

Sometimes. Sometimes there may be medical reasons for a child's condition or examination findings and abuse can be 'ruled out'. Sometimes it is not possible to rule in, or rule out, the possibility that a child might have been abused or assaulted.

Many abused children have normal physical examination findings. Sometimes doctors are able to conclude that an injury is more likely to be the result of abuse than an accident.

Under Victorian law, if a doctor or nurse forms a belief that a child has been physically or sexually abused then the doctor or nurse must notify Child Protection (DHS).

Will it cost anything?

No, it will not cost parents or children any money. VFPMS is funded by the Victorian Government, so there is no direct cost to the family for VFPMS services.

What kind of doctors work at VFPMS?

All VFPMS doctors have undertaken specific training in the assessment of children with injuries and/or possible abuse or neglect. The doctors are paediatricians, forensic physicians or trainees in paediatric medicine. Both male and female doctors work at VFPMS. From 9.00am – 5.00pm, Monday to Friday, a nurse manager coordinates and assists with examinations.

VFPMS has purpose-built facilities that are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at The Royal Children's Hospital and Monash Medical Centre for children who might have been abused. This includes a 'clean room' for collection of samples for forensic DNA analysis.

Will it hurt?

Almost certainly no. As with any visit to a doctor, children and their parents can sometimes feel anxious; although many children and adolescents find genital examinations a little embarrassing, the doctor is aware of this and will spend time explaining what will happen.

Who can be present during the examination?

A child can choose a person to comfort and support them, such as a parent or guardian, relative, adult friend, case manager, counsellor or foster care worker.

Children are encouraged to have a support person with them while they are examined.