



Know
Before
You
Go

THE UNITED KINGDOM

A Guide to Keep You Safe Abroad

Provided by Sexual Assault Support and
Help for Americans Abroad (SASHAA)

Updated June 2017



Let's be perfectly clear, the number one way to prevent sexual assault is to **not rape**. While the responsibility of ending sexual gender-based violence is on the perpetrators, this guide will offer general safety tips, country-specific information, and resources to help prevent and prepare travelers for the possibility of sexual assault abroad.

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS:

1. Use the **buddy system** and travel with friends!
2. Be aware of **social and cultural norms**. For example, looking at someone in the eyes when you speak to them is perfectly normal in the U.S., but in another country that could signify you're interested in the person.
3. **Recognize controlling behavior** when entering a relationship. Most rape survivors recall feeling "uncomfortable" about some of their partner's behaviors such as degrading jokes/language or refusal to accept "no" as an answer, whether in a sexual context or otherwise.²
4. **Avoid secluded places** where you could be more vulnerable. Meet new people in public spaces and let a trusted friend know where you'll be beforehand.
5. **Trust your gut**. Many victims have a "bad feeling" right before an assault takes place.



ALCOHOL AND DRUG AWARENESS:

- Always be sure to watch your drink being poured and carry it yourself, even to the bathroom.
- Be aware of "drug-facilitated sexual assault drugs," also referred to as 'roofies' or 'club drugs,' which may turn your drink bright blue, cloudy, or slightly salty. Effects such as impaired judgment, lost sense of sight, sound, or consciousness can be felt within 15 minutes and up to 4 hours.³
- It is illegal to sell, serve, offer or consume alcoholic beverages in public under the age of 18. Challenge 21 and Challenge 25 is an effort by The British Beer and Pub Association to have retailers ask customers for proof of ID if they look under 21 (or 25).⁴

CULTURAL INFORMATION:

Major Religions: 64% Christian, 5% Muslim, 1.4% Hindu, 0.5% Jewish, 0.4% Buddhist, 0.1% Folk Religion, 28% No Religion.⁵

Legal System: The U.K. contains three legal systems: Northern Ireland Law, Scots Law, and English Law (applies to England and Wales). While many laws are universal throughout the U.K., other laws vary by region.

Social/Cultural Norms: The United Kingdom refers to England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, all of which are governed by parliament in London. It is important to note that these four countries each have their own distinct sense of identity and nationalism.

Gender Equality: A 2015 survey by the World Economic Forum ranked the United Kingdom 18th out of 142 countries in terms of gender equality compared to the United States which ranked 28th.⁶



Sexual Assault and the Law: United Kingdom Context

Sexual assault, assault by penetration, and rape are separately defined by the Sexual Offenses Act of 2003 with a minimum sentence of 6 months and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. "Rape is a crime of basic intent, and drunkenness is not a defense." Sexual assault includes intentional sexual touching without consent. The legal definitions are the same for the entire United Kingdom. Like in the United States, spousal rape and rape of LGBTQ and male victims are clearly included in the legal definitions of sexual assault and rape.⁷

If You Experience Sexual Assault...

Don't blame yourself! **Sexual assault is never the fault of the victim.** You may be unsure of how to proceed, and that's okay. First, consider taking the following actions:

1. If you are in a safe place, **call someone you trust** to be with you. If you are not safe, call someone you trust to come and get you.
2. Do **self-collection of evidence**. Put all of the clothes you were wearing, bed sheets, and so on in a paper bag. If you have any injuries, **take pictures**. If there is semen present, collect what you can in a hotel glass or cup and put it in the paper bag.
3. **Call a SASHAA advocate** internationally toll free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can help you through the ordeal, honoring your decisions. (See Resources)

Medical Care and Reporting Sexual Assault in The U.K.

If you decide to report your assault to the police, they will refer you to a Sexual Assault Referral Center (SARC) where you can choose to receive a sexual assault forensic examination (SAFE). In London, that SARC will be the Havens (See Resources). In London if you want to receive a SAFE without involving the police you can contact the Havens directly, although in other parts of the country you may have to report to the police in order to receive a forensic exam. SAFEs are conducted by trained doctors and crisis workers who act as victim advocates and doctor support. Forensic examinations are available up to 7 days after vaginal intercourse and 72 hours after anal intercourse. The exam generally includes a description of the event and full medical history, documentation of injuries using body diagrams, skin, mouth, fingernail, vaginal, penile, and anal swabs, and blood, urine, and hair samples. Exams are free of charge and victims can generally bring one or two friends or family members for support.⁷

LGBTQ VICTIM CONCERNS



LGBTQ rights in the U.K. are some of the best in Europe,⁸ and it is most likely safe for LGBTQ victims to report their assault to the police. However, it is important to note that attitudes towards the LGBTQ community are less favorable in Northern Ireland where same-sex marriage is still illegal. For LGBTQ victim resources check out organizations like Galop and Survivors UK that offer LGBTQ-specific information and service.

POST EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS, EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION, AND ABORTION

Q. Are post exposure prophylaxis and emergency contraception available?

A: Yes, both emergency contraception (i.e. the morning after pill) and HIV prophylaxis are widely available in the U.K.⁹

Q: Is abortion legal in The U.K.?

A: Abortion is legal in England, Scotland, and Wales under the 1967 Abortion Act up to 24 weeks of pregnancy, and in some cases past 24 weeks. Abortions must be carried out in licensed hospitals or clinics and approved by two doctors. However, abortion is largely not legal in Northern Ireland except in the case of permanent damage to the woman's mental or physical health.^{9, 10}

Resources

SASHAA

SASHAA International Crisis Line:

To call our confidential, toll-free, International Crisis Line first dial the country specific AT&T access code for **The United Kingdom (0-800-89-0011 or 0-500-89-0011)**. Then, at the prompt, enter our phone number: **866-USWOMEN (866-879-6636)**.

Crisis Email:

To reach a SASHAA advocate, you can email us at crisis@866uswomen.org. All crisis emails will be responded to within 24 hours. However, if you need to get in touch with us immediately, please call the international toll-free crisis line.

Live Chat:

SASHAA online chat services are available 24/7 at our website <https://sashaa.org>.

U.S. EMBASSIES/CONSULATES

U.S. Embassy London

24 Grosvenor Square, London, W1A 2LQ
Tel: [44] (0)20 7499-9000

U.S. Consulate General in Belfast

Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Road
Belfast BT9 5GR
Tel: [44] (0)28-9038-6100

U.S. Consulate General in Edinburgh

3 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BW
Tel: [44] (0)131-556-8315

RAPE CRISIS CENTERS

National Rape Crisis Helpline

Call **0808 802 9999** between 12 noon – 2.30pm and 7 – 9.30pm any day of the year and also between 3 - 5.30pm on weekdays for confidential support and/or information about your nearest services.

Rape Crisis England & Wales

Email: rcewinfo@rapecrisis.org.uk

Website: <http://rapecrisis.org.uk/index.php>

NON-GOVERNMENTAL

British Pregnancy and Advisory Services (BPAS)

British Pregnancy and Advisory Services is a healthcare charity that provides information and resources regarding abortion and contraceptives in the U.K.

Hotline: 03457 30 40 30 (available 24/7)

Email: info@bpas.org

Website: <https://www.bpas.org/>

HAVENS (SEXUAL ASSAULT REFERRAL CENTERS)

The Havens are specialist centers in London that provide forensic medical examinations (FMEs) and 12-month follow-up care including sexual health screening and counseling services.

Hotline: **020 3299 6900** (24/7)

Non-Urgent Inquiries: **020 3299 1599** (9-5, M – F)

Website: <https://www.thehavens.org.uk/>

Camberwell Haven in South London

Near King's College Hospital, SE5 9RS

Paddington Haven in West London

Near to St Mary's Hospital, W2 1NY

Whitechapel Haven in east London

Near to The Royal London Hospital, E1 5DG

To find your nearest Sexual Assault Referral Center call the National Health Service (NHS) **111 non-emergency line, speak to your GP or the Accident & Emergency department of your local hospital, or visit the NHS Choices website.

POLICE

Dial **999** to contact the police (equivalent to 911 in the United States)

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References

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