SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

A Fact Sheet for Students

FACTS

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is a rare but tragic event that claims the lives of approximately 7,000 children each year in the United States, according to the American Heart Association. SCA is not a heart attack. It is an abnormality in the heart's electrical system that abruptly stops the heartbeat. SCA affects all students, in all sports or activities, and in all age levels. It may even occur in athletes who are in peak shape. The majority of activity-related cardiac arrests are due to congenital (inherited) heart defects. However, SCA may also occur after a person experiences an illness which has caused an inflammation to the heart or after a direct blow to the chest. Once SCA occurs, there is very little time to save the person. So, identifying those at risk before the arrest occurs is a key factor in prevention.

WARNING SIGNS

Possible warning signs of SCA include:

- Fainting
- Difficulty Breathing
- Chest Discomfort or Pain
- Dizziness
- Abnormal Racing Heart Rate

ASSESSING RISK

Health care providers may use several tests to help detect risk factors for SCA. One such test is the electrocardiogram (ECG). An ECG is a simple, painless test that detects and records the heart's electrical activity. It is used to detect heart problems and monitor a person's heart health. There are no serious risks to a person having an ECG. ECG's are used as a screening tool to detect abnormalities before a person has symptoms, or as a diagnostic tool to help identify persons who would benefit from interventions to reduce the risk of a heart-related condition.

Developed and Reviewed by the Indiana Department of Education's Sudden Cardiac Arrest Advisory Board (May 2021)

What are the risks of practicing or playing after experiencing warning symptoms?

There are risks associated with continuing to practice or play after experiencing warning symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest. When the heart stops, so does blood flow to the brain and other vital organs. Death or permanent brain damage follows in just a few minutes. Most people who experience SCA die from it. However, when SCA is witnessed and an onsite automated external defibrillator (AED) is deployed in a timely manner, survival rates approach 50%.

How am I able to protect myself from SCA?

Daily physical activity, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep are all important aspects of life-long health. Additionally, you can assist by:

- Knowing if you have a family history of SCA (onset of heart disease in a family member before the age of 50 or a sudden, unexplained death at an early age)
- Telling your health care provider during your pre-season physical about any unusual symptoms of feeling faint, shortness of breath, chest discomfort, dizziness, or racing or irregular heart rate, especially if you feel these symptoms with physical activity
- Taking only prescription drugs that are prescribed to you by your health care provider
- Being aware that the inappropriate use of prescription medications, energy drinks, or vaping can increase your risk
- Being honest and reporting symptoms

What should I do if I notice the warning signs that may lead to SCA?

1. *Tell an adult – your parent, your coach, your athletic trainer, your band leader, or your school nurse*
2. *Get checked out by your health care provider*
3. *Take care of your heart*
4. *Remember that the most dangerous thing you can do is to do nothing*