

SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

A Fact Sheet for Parents

FACTS

The American Heart Association estimates 23,000 children experience sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) annually, resulting in 2,000 deaths. SCA is not a heart attack. It is caused by an abnormality in the heart's electrical system that abruptly stops the heartbeat. SCA may affect any student, in any sport or activity, at any age level. 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.

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 an 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 test. ECG's are able to detect a majority of heart conditions more effectively than a physical exam and health history alone.

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 automatic defibrillator (AED) is deployed in a timely manner, survival rates approach 90%.

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How can I help prevent my child from experiencing SCA?

Daily physical activity, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep are all important aspects of life-long health. Additionally, parents can assist students prevent death from SCA by:

- Ensuring your child knows about any family history of early onset heart disease (before the age of 50)
- Ensuring your child has a pre- season screening exam prior to participation in an organized athletic activity
- Asking if your school and the site of competition have a venue specific emergency action plan for SCA that has been shared with students, and the location of the nearest properly maintained/operational AED
- Asking your child's coach/activity director who on-site is CPR/AED trained
- Becoming CPR/AED trained yourself
- Ensuring your child is not using any non-prescribed stimulants or performance enhancing drugs
- Being aware that the inappropriate use of prescription medications, energy drinks, or vaping increase risk
- Encouraging your child to be honest and report symptoms of chest discomfort, unusual shortness of breath, racing or irregular heartbeat, or feeling faint

What should I do if I think my child has warning signs that may lead to SCA?

1. *Tell your child's coach or band leader about any previous events or family history*
2. *Keep your child out of play or band*
3. *Seek medical attention right away*

What are the survival steps for sudden cardiac arrest?

- *Immediate activation of EMS*
- *Early CPR with an emphasis on chest compressions*
- *Immediate use of the onsite AED*
- *Integrated post-cardiac arrest care*