

AEDs can prevent young athletes from dying of sudden cardiac arrest

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It strikes without warning and is the No. 1 cause of death in young athletes.

This startling fact about sudden cardiac arrest has prompted several states to pass laws that make sure schools have access to automated external defibrillators (AEDs). Some states are even teaching students how to use them.

Sudden cardiac arrest is when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating. It can cause death within minutes. It usually strikes young athletes during competition or practice.

An AED can check a person's heart rhythm and send a shock that will return the heart rhythm to normal.

"You need to be prepared to save a life, and these devices without a doubt can save a life," said Alex B. Diamond, D.O., FAAP, an American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) pediatric sports medicine expert.

When the heart stops beating, acting quickly can mean the difference between life or death. For every minute that passes, the chance of survival goes down by 10%. The AED should be located near the gymnasium or athletic field. It should take no more than three minutes to get the AED and return to the victim, Dr. Diamond said.

"It will not shock someone who does not need it, so you do not have to worry about hurting someone by discharging a shock when they don't actually need it," he said. "As soon as you open the box, a voice will automatically start talking to you and tell you exactly what to do."

Sudden cardiac arrest symptoms include:

- chest pain;
- lightheadedness or dizziness when exercising;
- shortness of breath that is not caused by exercise or is more than peers;
- feeling like your heart is skipping a beat; and
- passing out.

The AAP recommends that young athletes have a sports physical every year.

Athletes who are concerned about their heart health should visit their pediatrician or pediatric cardiologist.

Find information about pediatric heart conditions on HealthyChildren.org, <http://bit.ly/2tH9Bzw>.

