How Parents Can Protect Young Hearts

Did you know that we lose thousands of youth each year to Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)? SCA is a condition in which the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating. When this happens, oxygen-rich blood stops flowing to the brain and other vital organs, causing loss of consciousness or seizure-like activity in seconds.

SCA is not a heart attack. That’s a plumbing problem—a blockage that stops blood flow to the heart—and typically a condition that happens over age 35. Young hearts that suddenly stop beating have an electrical or structural problem. Sometimes they’re born with it or it develops as they grow. And lots of times it gets overlooked because comprehensive cardiovascular assessments are not a standard part of youth health care.

How Common is SCA in Youth?
- 1 in 300 youth have an undetected heart condition
- #1 killer of student athletes
- Leading cause of death on school campuses
- Contributes to the #2 medical cause of death under age 25

Warnings Signs of Potential Heart Condition
- Fainting or seizure during or after physical activity
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Chest pain
- Palpitations, racing or irregular heart beat
- Unusual shortness of breath
- Excessive fatigue/tiredness
- Family history of heart abnormalities
- Unexplained death of family member under the age of 50

What Causes SCA?
- Structural abnormalities of the heart muscle
- Functional abnormalities of the heart’s electrical system
- Inflammation of the heart muscle caused by an infection
- Blunt blow to the chest
- Recreational drugs
- Use of performance-enhancing supplements, diet pills and energy drinks

How Can SCA Be Prevented?
- Know your family heart history
- Complete a cardiac risk assessment with your child
- Recognize warning signs and symptoms of a heart condition
- Prompt evaluation by an appropriate medical provider
- Get a cardiovascular assessment* at least every two years
- Learn CPR
- Advocate for automated external defibrillators (AEDs) wherever youth congregate
- Champion SCA prevention at your school

*Includes diagnostic tests such as an electrocardiogram (EKG/ECG) echocardiogram or exercise stress test

Parent Heart Watch. THE NATIONAL VOICE PROTECTING YOUTH FROM SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

Empowering parents, educators, nurses, coaches and athletic trainers in schools and school districts across the country to help us eliminate preventable deaths and disabilities from SCA in youth.
Preventing the Leading Cause of Death on School Campuses

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is the leading cause of death on school campuses¹—more than fires, violence, accidents, pre-existing health issues, head injuries, natural disasters or toxins. Many of these events have lessened by national attention or the enactment of prevention standards. Sadly, there is no national standard to prevent sudden cardiac death, even though 92% of victims die.²

We know that survival rates increase dramatically when cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillators (AEDs) are used within the first three minutes of collapse.³ With the national EMS response rate averaging 8 to 12 minutes,⁴ that means people at the scene are a bridge to life. But unless there’s a written and well-practiced Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP) in place, chances are they won’t be ready.

CPR and AED legislation varies by state, and no one is monitoring noncompliance. That’s why it’s critical for schools and school districts to champion prevention in their communities by implementing a CERP.

Created by a national task force of health and safety organizations including AHA, AASA, AAP, NASN, SHAPE America and Parent Heart Watch,⁵ a CERP enhances a safe school environment for students, staff and visitors.

If you could prevent a tragedy from happening at your school, wouldn’t you?
Visit parentheartwatch.org/cardiac-emergency-response-plan to get started.

What a CERP Can Do for Your School/District

- Raise SCA Awareness
  Helps educate students, parents, staff and coaches about the incidence of SCA in youth and how everyone can be prepared to save a life.

- Implement Emergency Response Protocol
  Easily personalize CERP template and use implementation resources to share with your school community and facility renters.

- Develop a Response-Ready Team
  A Cardiac Emergency Response Team will be CPR/AED trained. They help implement the plan and conduct drills.

- Properly Install and Maintain AEDs
  Install to allow access within 3 minutes from collapse to shock—never lock away. Regular maintenance of battery and pads will ensure readiness when needed.

- Conduct Life-Saving Drills
  Like fire drills, CERPs only work if you practice them. Drill templates help test your team’s readiness and your plan’s effectiveness.

Protecting Students & Student Athletes from Sudden Cardiac Arrest

Did you know that one child suffers sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) nearly every hour each year? In fact, studies show that 1 in 300 youth have an undetected heart condition that puts them at risk. What’s more, SCA is the #1 killer of student athletes.

In spite of these statistics, cardiac risk assessments are not a standard part of well-child checkups or pre-participation physical exams, leaving parents/guardians unaware of potential warning signs and risk factors for a heart condition.

An American Board of Family Medicine study noted that 72% of youth who had a sudden cardiac arrest were reported by their parents to have had at least one cardiovascular symptom before the event—they just didn’t recognize it as life threatening. Families spend ample resources preparing kids to participate in activities they love, but they often overlook the need to be sure their hearts are healthy enough to play.

Coaches, physical education and health teachers can play a critical role in educating their school community and their students about how to monitor heart health.

Recognize Warning Signs Fainting is the number one symptom of a potential heart condition. Others include chest pain or discomfort; dizziness or light-headedness; racing heart, palpitations or irregular heartbeat (especially at rest); shortness of breath; unusual fatigue and unexplained seizure.

Identify Red Flags While most kids experience these symptoms at some point, chronic or excessive occurrence is not typical. Especially if kids are on a regular exercise program, their body should be getting stronger, not breaking down, so consulting a doctor is recommended.

Understand Risk Factors Many heart conditions are inherited so it’s important to review your family heart history. Tell a doctor if a family member had a heart abnormality (repaired or not); sudden death before age 50; unexplained fainting, seizures, near/drowning or unexplained car accidents.

Empower Kids to Engage When parents complete medical history questionnaires, they often do so absent of their child’s input. Parents assume they’d know if something was wrong—that’s not always true. Teach kids to take part in this assessment and consider the questions thoughtfully.

Encourage Kids to Speak Up Young people often don’t tell adults if they experience symptoms. They may be frightened, embarrassed, unwilling to jeopardize playing time or simply unaware that what they are feeling indicates they may have a heart condition that puts them at risk for SCA or death.

Give Kids the Facts Youth must understand they are at increased risk of sudden cardiac arrest if using performance enhancing or recreational drugs, high-caffeine supplements (energy drinks) or diet pills.

Champion a CERP at Your School Cardiac Emergency Response Plans assure that your community is ready to prevent the leading cause of death on school campuses by being prepared to respond with a well-practiced plan that includes CPR/AED trained staff, properly maintained AEDs and EMS coordination.

Use Our Free Educational Resources In our toolkit you’ll find free posters, flyers, fact sheets, graphics, research papers, a cardiac risk assessment, CPR and AED tools, cardiac chain of survival training, videos and more. Visit parentheartwatch.org/take-promise

Protect Your Child’s Heart

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is caused by a structural or electrical abnormality in the heart causing a fatal arrhythmia that suddenly and unexpectedly stops the heart from beating. While CPR can be a bridge to life, the only way to restart the heart is with an automated external defibrillator (AED).

Emergency medical responders are equipped with AEDs, but given every minute’s delay in defibrillation decreases the chance of survival by 10%, having an onsite AED at the ready in three minutes or less is critical.

While SCA is the #1 killer of student athletes and the leading cause of death on school campuses, sadly, we don’t yet have a national standard requiring AEDs anywhere youth congregate and state requirements vary greatly. That’s why parents, educators, coaches and all youth advocates must come together to make their facility and playing fields safe.

AED and The Law
If your child has been diagnosed by a physician to have a heart condition, s/he is entitled to have access to an AED on school grounds or field trips as part of a 504 Plan or Individual Action Plan (IEP). Check out our Prevention Promise Toolkit for more information, or learn more at the Department of Education. If your doctor has written an Rx for an AED but your insurance is denying coverage, visit LifeSure for assistance.

Maintain Your AED
Registering your AED with Atrus National AED Registry will serve as a reminder to be prepared to save a life:
- AED inspection
- Battery and pads expiration date alerts
- Manufacturer recall alerts

Be Prepared to Respond to a Cardiac Emergency
Visit ParentHeartWatch.org for a free toolkit to implement a Cardiac Emergency Response Plan (CERP) at your school.

Get CPR/AED training from a community resource, your local fire department or visit these national organizations to find training in your area:
- American Heart Association
- Emergency Care and Safety Institute
- American Red Cross
- National Safety Council

How Can You Get an AED?
Use the resources at parentheartwatch.org/getaed to make a presentation or apply for funding.

School Support
- PTA, Student or Booster Club Fundraiser
- School Board Initiative

Civic Groups
- Rotary
- Kiwanis
- Lions
- Jr. Service League
- Women’s Club

Crowdfunding
- Got AED
- ThinkAED

Grants
- AED Superstore
- AEDGrant.com
- Your Community Foundations

Parent Heart Watch & Member Programs
- Get Charged Up!
- Local PHW Foundations

Cardiac Science
Defibtech
HeartSine
Philips
Physio-Control
Zoll