

SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

A Fact Sheet for Student Athletes

FACTS

Sudden cardiac arrest can occur even in athletes who are in peak shape. Approximately 500 deaths are attributed to sudden cardiac arrest in athletes each year in the United States. Sudden cardiac arrest can affect all levels of athletes, in all sports, and in all age levels. The majority of cardiac arrests are due to congenital (inherited) heart defects. However, sudden cardiac arrest can 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 a cardiac arrest occurs, there is very little time to save the athlete, so identifying those at risk before the arrest occurs is a key factor in prevention.

WARNING SIGNS

There may not be any noticeable symptoms before a person experiences loss of consciousness and a full cardiac arrest (no pulse and no breathing).

Warning signs can include a complaint of:

- Chest Discomfort
- Unusual Shortness of Breath
- Racing or Irregular Heartbeat
- Fainting or Passing Out

EMERGENCY SIGNS – Call EMS (911)

If a person experiences any of the following signs, call EMS (911) immediately:

- *If an athlete collapses suddenly during competition*
- *If a blow to the chest from a ball, puck or another player precedes an athlete's complaints of any of the warning signs of sudden cardiac arrest*
- *If an athlete does not look or feel right and you are just not sure*

How can I help prevent a sudden cardiac arrest?

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 sudden cardiac arrest (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 chest discomfort, shortness of breath, racing or irregular heartbeat, or feeling faint, 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 or energy drinks can increase your risk
- Being honest and reporting symptoms of chest discomfort, unusual shortness of breath, racing or irregular heartbeat, or feeling faint

What should I do if I think I am developing warning signs that may lead to sudden cardiac arrest?

1. *Tell an adult – your parent or guardian, your coach, your athletic trainer 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*