

What Every Teacher Should Know About Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)

Sudden cardiac arrest is not a heart attack. The heart stops beating effectively, without warning, and the person collapses within seconds. It can happen to anyone, at any time, including a student who has never had a symptom or a diagnosis. Survival depends almost entirely on how quickly the adults nearby begin CPR and apply an AED.

1 RECOGNIZING IT

Unresponsive

Does not react when shouted at or shaken

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Not breathing normally

Not breathing, or only gasping

SCA often looks like a seizure at first. Brief jerking movements are common in cardiac arrest and are frequently mistaken for a seizure. If you are not certain, treat it as cardiac arrest. You cannot make things worse by intervening, but you can by waiting.

2 WHEN SCA OCCURS

1

Call 911

Give the school address and the nearest entrance. Stay on the line.

2

Send for the AED

Point at one person, say their name, and tell them where it is.

3

Begin CPR

Push hard and fast in the centre of the chest, about twice a second.

4

Use the AED

Turn it on and follow the spoken prompts. It will not shock someone who does not need it.

5

Keep going

Continue until paramedics take over. Swap with someone else every two minutes if you can.

3 NOTICING WHAT OTHERS MISS

You watch students run, climb and compete constantly. Some warning signs of an undiagnosed heart condition only show up during physical activity, which means you may be the only person who sees the warning signs.

- Fainting or near-fainting during exercise
- Fainting after a sudden noise or a startle
- Fainting with no warning at all
- A seizure that happens during exercise
- Chest pain, or a racing or pounding heartbeat during activity
- Shortness of breath or exhaustion well beyond classmates
- A family history of sudden unexplained death before age 50

Fainting during exercise is never normal. It is one of the most important warning signs of an underlying heart condition, and it can be written off as heat, dehydration or not eating breakfast.

If you see one of these, tell the office and the family the same day, and suggest the family raise it with their doctor and ask specifically about a heart assessment. You are not diagnosing anything. You are passing on something only you saw.

The nearest AED to this room is _____

One more thing. Your school should also have a written cardiac emergency response plan. Ask the office whether yours does. If it does not, there is a free template at sads.ca.