2025-26 ACPS

SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST GUIDELINES

IMPORTANT INFORMATION, PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Albemarle County Public Schools — Sudden Cardiac Arrest Guidelines

The Code of Virginia 22.1-271.8 directs Virginia school divisions to develop and distribute guidelines on policies to inform and educate coaches, student-athletes, and student-athletes' parents or guardians about the nature and risk of sudden cardiac arrest, procedures for removal from and return to play, and the risks of not reporting symptoms. The guidelines shall also be posted on the Department's website.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Facts

- Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is not a heart attack. It is an abnormality in the heart's electrical system that abruptly stops the heartbeat resulting in no blood flow to the brain and vital organs. Sudden cardiac arrest can affect all students, in all sports or activities, and in all age levels.
- Sudden cardiac death in young athletes is rare. About 100 such deaths are reported in the United States each year.
- Sudden cardiac arrest is more common in:
  - Males than females
  - In football and basketball than other sports
  - In Black athletes than in other races or ethnic groups
- Exercise can be a trigger for sudden cardiac arrest in individuals with an abnormal heart condition.
- 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 that has caused inflammation to the heart or after a direct blow to the chest.
- Conditions associated with SCA are frequently, but not always, identified during annual checkups or preparticipation sports physical exams. Individuals with a family history of SCA or other risk factors or warning signs (below) should be evaluated by a physician for cardiac abnormalities diagnosed by an EKG or echocardiogram or referred to a cardiologist.

Coaches Education Course Requirement

All ACPS coaches must complete the **NFHS Sudden Cardiac Arrest Course**. This course will help coaches learn and recognize the warning signs and symptoms of Sudden Cardiac Arrest and contains guidelines for life-saving action during the critical moments after an individual suddenly collapses such as calling 9-1-1, starting chest compressions and sending for an AED.

Warning Signs and Risk Factors for Sudden Cardiac Arrest

Warning Signs	Factors That Increase the Risk of Cardiac Arrest
▪ Repeated dizziness or lightheadedness when exercising ▪ Fainting or seizure, especially during or right after exercise ▪ Fainting repeatedly or with excitement or startle ▪ Excessive shortness of breath during exercise not related to asthma ▪ Racing, or fluttering heart palpitations or irregular heartbeat with exertion ▪ Repeated dizziness or lightheadedness ▪ Chest pain or discomfort during or after exercise ▪ Excessive, unexpected fatigue during or after exercise ▪ Sudden weakness	▪ Family history of known heart abnormalities or sudden death before the age of 40 ▪ Specific family history of long QT Syndrome, Brugada Syndrome, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy or arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia ▪ Family members with unexplained fainting, seizures, drowning or near drowning or car accidents ▪ Known structural heart abnormality, repaired or unrepaired ▪ Use of drugs, such as cocaine, inhalants, recreational drugs, excessive energy drinks or performance-enhancing supplements

Any student-athlete who is experiencing symptoms that may lead to sudden cardiac arrest will be immediately removed from play. A student-athlete who is removed from play shall not return to play until they are evaluated and receive written clearance to return to physical activity by an appropriate licensed health care provider as determined by the Board of Education.

Recognize and Respond: 911, CPR, and AED

If an athlete collapses, assume it is a sudden cardiac arrest until proven otherwise. The most important factors determining whether a person survives sudden cardiac arrest is rapid initiation of high-quality CPR and how quickly he or she receives a shock from an automated external defibrillators (AED). A few minutes' delay can be the difference between life and death. Thus, all bystanders should emphasize:

- Immediate activation of EMS
- Early CPR with an emphasis on chest compressions
- Immediate use of the onsite AED

Measures Parents Can Take to Help Control Risk of Sudden Cardiac Arrest

Daily physical activity, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep are all important aspects of lifelong health. Additionally, parents can assist in reducing risk factors and support emergency readiness by:

- Ensuring your child has a thorough preseason screening exam prior to participation in an organized athletic activity
- Asking if your school and the site of competition have automated external defibrillators (AED's) that are close by and properly maintained
- Asking if your child's coach is CPR/AED certified
- Becoming CPR/AED certified 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 increases risk
- Encouraging your child to be honest and report symptoms of chest discomfort, unusual shortness of breath, racing or irregular heartbeat, or feeling faint

Albemarle County Public Schools — Implementation of Sudden Cardiac Arrest Death Prevention Program

Athletics Departments in Albemarle County Public Schools will implement Code of Virginia 22.1-271.8 as listed below:

- Parents/student-athletes will verify receipt of SCA Warning Signs and Risk Factors for Heart Condition info sheet through each school's respective registration process for athletics.
- Each school will provide links to the **SCA Warning Signs and Risk Factors for Heart Condition** info sheet and these ACPS SCA guidelines on their respective athletic department websites.
- Each coach in ACPS shall complete, one time, the NFHS online Sudden Cardiac Arrest course.
- ACPS ATC's will work cooperatively with each respective school's coaching staff to administer ACPS SCA Guidelines.

Keep Your Heart in the Game

Cardiac conditions are the leading cause of death among athletes at all levels. Speak up if you experience any of these symptoms. It's better to check in than check out!

Warning Signs for Sudden Cardiac Arrest

- Fainting or seizure, especially during or right after exercise
- Fainting with excitement or startle
- Excessive shortness of breath even after regular exercise
- Racing or fluttering heart palpitations, especially when you're at rest
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Chest pain or discomfort with exercise
- Excessive, unexpected fatigue during or after exercise

Risk Factors for a Heart Condition

- Family history of sudden death before age 40
- Family history of known heart abnormalities, repaired or not
- Family members with unexplained fainting, seizures, drowning or near drowning or car accidents
- Excessive energy drinks, diet pills or performance-enhancing supplements
- Drug use



Consult a physician if any of these apply to you.

ERIC PAREDES SAVE A LIFE FOUNDATION