

American Heart Association Urges Quick Action To Save Victims Of Cardiac Arrest

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)—When someone goes into cardiac arrest, it becomes a desperate race against the clock to save his or her life. Every second counts.

Tragically, each day several hundred cardiac arrest victims die before they reach the hospital. In fact, the national survival rate for sudden cardiac arrest is less than 5 percent.

February is American Heart Month, and the American Heart Association is urging all Pennsylvanians to help improve the cardiac arrest survival rate by taking quick action when faced with a cardiac emergency:

1. Know the warning signs of a heart attack and symptoms of cardiac arrest in order to recognize a medical emergency when it occurs. The warning signs of a

heart attack are: uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes; pain spreading to the shoulders, neck or arms; chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath. A heart attack can lead to sudden cardiac arrest. Symptoms of cardiac arrest are different: the person collapses and loses consciousness, he or she stops normal breathing, and loses pulse and blood pressure.

2. Upon recognizing any heart attack or cardiac arrest symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately to access the emergency medical system. Too many people go

through denial and, as a result, wait too long before seeking medical attention.

3. Give cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to victims of sudden cardiac arrest because it can help keep someone alive until emergency help arrives. CPR is important because it maintains vital blood flow to the heart and brain which helps sustain the victim until defibrillation (electric shock to the heart) can be administered.

"Since 70 to 80 percent of all cardiac arrest emergencies occur in the home, knowing CPR may help you save the life of a loved one," said Dwight David, M.D., president of the Pennsylvania Delaware affiliate. "By taking

these crucial steps, Pennsylvanians can give cardiac arrest victims a second chance at life."

This American Heart Month initiative is part of the association's Operation Heartbeat program, designed to strengthen the cardiac arrest chain of survival nationwide. Working with hospitals, members of the emergency medical services (EMS) community, first responders and others, the association hopes to improve the cardiac arrest survival rate in communities across the country.

"Approximately 700 cardiac arrest victims die every year in the United States," said Davis. "Through this American Heart Month initiative and our Operation Heartbeat program, we're hoping to make more Pennsylvanians aware of the problem of cardiac arrest, and show them how to help strengthen the cardiac arrest chain of survival in their communities."

More than 95 percent of Americans who suffer sudden cardiac arrest die before reaching the hospital, which equates to almost 250,000 deaths annually. The American Heart Association estimates that at least 50,000 lives could be saved each year if the sudden cardiac arrest national survival rate could be

increased from the current 5 percent to 20 percent or higher.

According to Davis, heart attack is one of the primary causes of cardiac arrest. Other causes can be electrocution, drowning, respiratory arrest, choking or trauma. When a person goes into cardiac arrest, the heart's electrical impulses become chaotic. This irregular heart rhythm, called ventricular fibrillation, causes the heart to stop suddenly.

"Automated external defibrillators, or AEDs, are electronic devices that deliver an electric shock to the heart to restore its natural rhythm," said Davis. "Early defibrillation is a critical link in the cardiac arrest chain of survival, and the only treatment to correct ventricular fibrillation."

To learn more about what to do in the event of a cardiac emergency or how to prevent a heart attack, call your local American Heart Association office or visit our website www.americanheart.org. Information about CPR courses offered by the American Heart Association is available by calling (877) AHA-4CPR or by visiting the website www.cpr-ecc.americanheart.org.

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