



SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST (SCA) FACT SHEET

For Parents & Student-Athletes

WHAT IS SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST?

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is a life-threatening emergency that occurs when the heart suddenly stops beating. It strikes people of all ages who may seem to be healthy, even children and teens. When SCA happens, the person collapses and doesn't respond or breathe normally. They may gasp or shake as if having a seizure, but their heart has stopped. SCA leads to death in minutes if the person does not get help right away. Survival depends on people nearby calling 911, starting CPR, and using an automated external defibrillator (AED) as soon as possible.

HOW COMMON IS SCA IN YOUNG ATHLETES?

As a leading cause of death in the U.S., most people are surprised to learn that SCA is also the #1 killer of student-athletes and the leading cause of death on school campuses. Studies show that 1 in 300 youth has an undetected heart condition that puts them at risk.

WARNING SIGNS – NEVER IGNORE

Report any of the following symptoms immediately to a coach, parent, or medical professional. Do not hide symptoms or play through them.

✓ Fainting, seizure, or convulsions during physical activity	✓ Pain or discomfort in arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach
✓ Fainting repeatedly or with excitement or startle	✓ Dizziness or lightheadedness during exertion
✓ Chest pain, tightness, or unusual pressure	✓ Feeling "not right" after physical activity
✓ Unexplained shortness of breath during activity	✓ Racing, fluttering, or irregular heartbeat
✓ Unusual or extreme fatigue with exercise	

RISK FACTORS – FAMILY HISTORY THAT MATTERS

Most heart conditions that cause SCA are inherited. Share any of the following with your health care provider and accurately complete your Pre-Participation Physical Evaluation form:

- ✓ Family history of known heart abnormalities or sudden death before age 50
- ✓ Specific family history of Long QT Syndrome, Brugada Syndrome, Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM), Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Dysplasia (ARVD), Wolff-Parkinson-White (WPW) Syndrome, Catecholaminergic Polymorphic Ventricular Tachycardia (CPVT), Marfan Syndrome
- ✓ Family members with known unexplained fainting, seizures, drowning or near-drowning, or car accidents
- ✓ Family members with a known structural heart abnormality, repaired or unrepaired
- ✓ Personal or family history of high blood pressure
- ✓ Use of cocaine, inhalants, "recreational" drugs, excessive energy drinks, diet pills or performance-enhancing supplements

WHAT CAUSES SCA?

SCA occurs because of a malfunction in the heart's electrical system or structure. The malfunction is caused by an abnormality the person is born with, and may have inherited, or a condition that develops as young hearts grow. A virus in the heart or a hard blow to the chest can also cause a malfunction that can lead to SCA.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

- ✓ Tell a coach, parent, or athletic trainer immediately if you have symptoms
- ✓ Do not hide symptoms or continue to practice/play
- ✓ When in doubt, speak up and sit out
- ✓ If a teammate collapses: get help, call 911, bring the AED

FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS

- ✓ Report concerning symptoms or family history to the school
- ✓ Do not allow participation without medical follow-up if symptoms are present
- ✓ Know your school's AED location and Emergency Action Plan
- ✓ Know the cardiac chain of survival — you may need it on the sidelines

CARDIAC CHAIN OF SURVIVAL – ACT IMMEDIATELY

1 RECOGNIZE Athlete unresponsive?	2 CALL 911 Activate EMS immediately	3 START CPR Hard & fast compressions, center of chest	4 USE AED As soon as available
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REMOVAL & RETURN TO PLAY

Under Montana HB 869 (2025), a student-athlete who exhibits signs or symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest may be removed from participation by a coach, athletic trainer, or official. The student-athlete may not return until evaluated and cleared in writing by a licensed physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner.

MORE INFORMATION

American Heart Association: www.heart.org

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation: www.sca-aware.org

MHSA Sports Medicine: mhsa.org/resources/sports-medicine