

Stayin' alive

When you see cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) portrayed on television, sometimes, it's more humor than helpful facts. Think Dwight Schrute cutting open a manikin.

But CPR is a life-saving skill. And for Jordan Meeks, a pediatric wellness specialist at [OSF HealthCare](#), it's a critical skill for young people to learn.

"Most cardiac arrests happen in people 40 years and older, a lot of teachers, parents, grandparents, coaches and those that young people are spending a lot of time with," Meeks says. "And young people are getting to a point where their body is maturing, so they're able to do those compressions with enough strength to be helpful."

Meeks visits schools across Illinois teaching students hands-only CPR. Recently, she was in Fisher, a small, rural town where it might take first responders a little longer to get to an emergency - all the more reason to equip junior high and high school students with CPR skills.

CPR basics

Meeks says CPR is used when someone is unconscious and in cardiac arrest (in other words, having a serious heart problem).

The first thing to do is call 9-1-1. If you're by yourself, put the phone on speaker while you help the ailing person. Get over the person, interlink your fingers and press hard in the middle of the chest over and over.

"It's compressing the chest in half at a rate of about 100 beats per minute. Think of the song [Stayin' Alive by the Bee Gees](#)," Meeks explains. "The compressions help restore blood flow to the body and brain, which is really important to help preserve that person's life."

CPR may also be done alongside an automated external defibrillator (AED), a small device that's common in schools and workplaces these days. Meeks explains that two pads are applied to the patient's skin - one near the heart and the other on the person's side - with wires leading to the AED box.

"It gives you step-by-step instructions. It's going to tell you when you need to stay clear of the patient. It will analyze the heart's rhythm to see if it's regular, irregular or not beating at all," Meeks says. "Then it will provide instructions on whether to deliver a shock. You press a button to deliver a shock. Then it will tell you to start CPR."

The AED will then continue the cycle of shocks and CPR until first responders arrive.

Teaching hands-only CPR does not require certification, Meeks says. Someone can easily learn the tools and pass them on to others.

Adding the skillset of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation - when you exhale into a patient's mouth to help revive them - is a little more involved. Meeks recommends calling your local first responders (police, fire and ambulance), your local hospital or the [American Red Cross](#) to learn about those CPR training opportunities.

Training young people

During her stop in Fisher, Meeks watched as students performed CPR and applied AEDs to manikins. A red light on the manikin meant the compressions were too fast or too slow. A green light signaled a good pace. To Meeks' delight, there were more green lights than red.

"The manikins are very much like the human body, so the students get a really good, hands-on experience with how CPR works," Meeks says. "They also learn how to use the AED. Most students know where it is in their school, but they've never seen it before. They have no idea how it works."

You can count Paige Ferguson and Kira Becker, both juniors at Fisher High School, among the adolescents who think the training is valuable.

"You just had to stay at a consistent pace, which was difficult [to start]. But once you got that pace going, it was pretty easy to stay with it," Ferguson says, describing the training.

"It's important to know this so you can help friends and teachers in your daily life. You can help save a person's life," Becker says.

One of those teachers is Doug Ingold, the health and physical education instructor who asked OSF to train the whole student body.

"It's great to have hands-on experience. It's different than just watching a video," Ingold says.

"Having OSF come in and give the students actual practical experience really gives them a good idea of what it takes to do CPR."