

EKG Screening & Student Athletes

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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They are the stories that tear at any parent's heart – especially if their child plays sports. A young, presumably healthy, young person collapses while practicing or playing a game from sudden cardiac arrest. If not treated immediately, they can die.

Cases of sudden cardiac arrest in children are rare. To put it in context, some studies suggest that the chance of being struck by lightning is more likely than actually dying from playing sports. Dying in a motor vehicle accident can be 20,000 times more likely.

Despite recommendations from the American Heart Association to the contrary, some organizations are promoting electrocardiograms (EKGs) – heart screenings – for student athletes in an effort to detect any issues.

SOT Dr. David Chan, Pediatric Cardiologist - OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois

(I think it is important for people to realize that this is exceedingly uncommon. It is quite controversial and unknown whether ECG screening truly picks up every one. We don't necessarily say it is a bad idea but we certainly do not have the science to say mass screening is appropriate :22)

V/O: Dr. David Chan is a pediatric cardiologist and understands parents' fears and desire to know if their child could collapse while playing a game. According to Dr. Chan, the reality is that even with a screening, there is no guarantee they would pick up everything.

The American Heart Association supports a screening with the child's primary care physician which includes a thorough physical and an honest look at the family history that could expose a genetic predisposition that can lead to cardiac arrest. Some of the things cardiologists look for is a family history of losing a baby to crib death or SIDS, or if somebody who is considered a decent swimmer drowns. That may be an event that is associated with Long QT syndrome.

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(Other common things we want to look out for is if someone has passing out episodes in the act of physical exercise. This this is where it gets a little tricky. We're not talking about those who exercise and afterwards feel a little dizzy. We're talking about someone who is physically active and while actually running or playing a game has an event where they pass out. :27)

V/O: Dr. Chan says what all schools and athletic teams should be doing is basic readiness training for all students, including when and how to call 9-1-1, how to do CPR, and how to use an automated external defibrillator or AED.

Dr. Chan says most schools have fire drills on a yearly basis, but rarely experience a fire, while medical emergencies occur on a regular basis, yet no such drills are held. He adds that the medical emergency will happen most often to an adult at the school or a loved one watching the student's game and knowing CPR and how to use an AED will be a useful, life-long skill.

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(I think it's a great idea that every athlete every high school student go through some basic life support CPR training. And certainly all of the adults who are involved with these type of programs and frankly all teachers should really consider getting training in basic life support. In most cases, the kids are not the ones who need the CPR or AED, it's really all the other individuals, the adults who are in the building that require the help. :32)

(This is the reason why we want to promote CPR, promote the use of the AED, learning how to get access to these important devices has made the biggest difference in saving lives and preserving that individual to full functionality if an event where to occur. :20)

Learn more about CPR and AED training through the [American Heart Association](#) and the [American Red Cross](#).