

The Importance of Emergency Medical Services, CPR and Defibrillation

EVERY MINUTE COUNTS.

On May 27, 1987, exactly 23 years ago, my father died from Sudden Cardiac Arrest. On May 20, 1987 he suffered ventricular fibrillation, which is when the heart's electrical impulses become irregular and the heart is unable to pump oxygen-rich blood through the body. By the time his heart was defibrillated and revived, he suffered irreparable brain damage and died 7 days later. Earlier heart defibrillation may have saved his life.

More than 350,000 Americans of all ages die each year from Sudden Cardiac Arrest, which is a leading cause of death in the U.S. Once a victim has suffered a cardiac arrest, every minute that passes before returning the heart to a normal rhythm decreases the chance of survival by 10%. The chances of surviving sudden cardiac arrest are dramatically improved if 9-1-1 is called right away, and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillators (AED) are applied within three to seven minutes.

That's why Contra Costa County Emergency Services is working hard to increase awareness of the use of CPR and AEDs with classes, health fairs and the installation of public defibrillators. My office has co-sponsored a number of these efforts, successfully installing AEDs in public locations throughout West County, such as at senior and community centers.

The Board of Supervisors is recognizing the importance of emergency health care in May and June. Last week (May 16 – 22) was National Emergency Medical Services Week, and next week (June 1 - 7) is National Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillation (AED) Awareness Week.

Emergency care providers play a critical role in treating cardiac arrest, and all medical emergencies. So do citizens trained in CPR or defibrillator use. They're often the "first responders" until the ambulance arrives, saving lives.

I hope you'll join me in learning CPR and defibrillator use. It's easy. Classes are held throughout the year at West County locations. For more information on locations and dates check:

- Contra Costa Emergency Medical Services at <http://cchealth.org/groups/ems/> or 1-925-646-4690
- The American Heart Association, www.americanheart.org or 1-800-242-8721.
- Contact my office and speak to Terrance Cheung at (510) 374-3231 or email us at dist1@bos.cccounty.us.

Someone's life, including your own, may depend on early response.

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