

Students train in life saving as schools get defibrillators

High schools first to install heart devices

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An initiative by the Calgary Board of Education will make city schools the first in Western Canada to be equipped with automated external defibrillators.

All 21 public senior high schools have been supplied with the machines, used to shock a stopped heart back to life.

Over the next five years, the board hopes to have the machines in all its 220 schools.

"(Defibrillators) are to be available in the event of a sudden cardiac arrest," said Rolf Haensel, school safety and security specialist for the CBE.

"It's rare, but it does happen in school."

Each high school was supplied with a defibrillator, which is stored in an alarmed case in the main hallway of the building, said Tom Parker, specialist for physical education, sports medicine and outdoor education for the CBE.

Phys-ed teachers have been trained to use the machines by Calgary EMS, and will train students in the classroom, said Parker.

For now, that means a 15-year-old may be the one shocking a fellow student back to life. According to the board and EMS, that's not a problem. They say the defibrillators are simple to operate and guide users through a series of voice prompts.

"One of the myths is this machine could do damage -- they cannot. They will not shock a beating heart," said Parker.

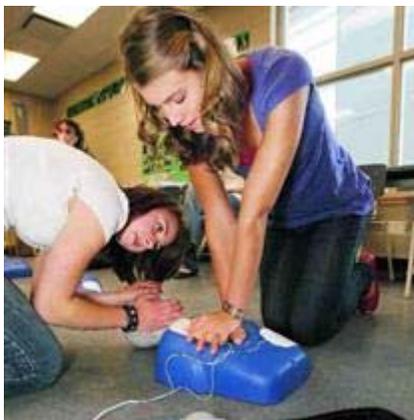
Tony Kendall, defibrillator co-ordinator for Calgary EMS, agreed.

"They're easy to use," Kendall said. "As long as you can read and listen, you're fine."

The initiative is being implemented in high schools first because teenagers are most susceptible to suffering cardiac episodes due to high stress loads, according to the board and EMS.

One Calgary parent, in particular, is pleased with the move.

Lorne Rosenau had never used a defibrillator before his 14-year-old son,



CREDIT: Jenelle Schneider, Calgary Herald
Centennial High School students Stephanie Chomyn, left, and Stephanie Inman demonstrate how automatic defibrillators are used. They've been placed in all Calgary public high schools.

Curtis, collapsed during a basketball practice last year at the Spray Lakes recreational facility in Cochrane.

At first, Rosenau -- who happened to be coaching the practice but did not witness the fall -- thought his son had simply tripped and knocked himself out. But it quickly became clear something was seriously wrong.

Curtis was having a heart attack.

According to Rosenau, Curtis received three shocks from the machine, stored on-site, before paramedics arrived.

"I had never used one before," Rosenau said of the defibrillator. "People tend to say I was on autopilot. I just got down to business and did what I needed to do."

His son is glad it worked.

"It's thanks to that defibrillator that I am standing here today," said Curtis, now 15.

Putting the machines in high schools cost \$40,000, but the school board didn't incur the cost, thanks to the sponsorship of Southcentre mall and Shaganappi Chevrolet.

The cost of implementing the program in all 220 schools is \$411,000. The actual amount the CBE will shoulder has yet to be determined, said Haensel.

Similar initiatives to install the devices in schools are underway in Toronto, said CBE officials.

The Calgary Catholic School District is looking into a program that would install the machines in its 104 schools, according to spokeswoman Tania Younker.

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