

Important Information about Sudden Cardiac Arrest for Parents and Student Athletes

Starting August 1, 2024, Louisiana Law [Act 421 (R.S. 17:440.3)] requires schools to inform parents and student athletes about heart health. Schools must provide written information about the requirements a student athlete who has or has had a heart-related issue must meet before participating in sports. This information must be given to parents and guardians, and they must sign to show they have received and understood it. This ensures proper communication and safety measures are in place for student athletes returning to play.

What is Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)?

Sudden Cardiac Arrest is the sudden loss of all heart activity (i.e. the heart stops beating). This stops blood flow to the body's organs. It usually occurs because of an abnormal heart rhythm called ventricular fibrillation. If CPR is not started quickly, SCA can lead to death within minutes.

Warning Signs and Symptoms of SCA

- Sudden collapse;
- No pulse;
- No breathing;
- Loss of consciousness

Sometimes other symptoms occur before sudden cardiac arrest. These might include:

- Chest discomfort.
- Shortness of breath.
- Weakness.
- Fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart; called palpitations.

*But sudden cardiac arrest often occurs with no warning. **If any of these symptoms occur during exercise, the student athlete should STOP PLAY AND SEE A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER immediately.***

Possible Causes of SCA:

- *Structural heart defects, like congenital heart diseases or Marfan syndrome;*

- *Problems with the heart's electrical system (which can make the heart beat too fast, too slow, or irregularly);*
- *Diseases affecting the heart muscle: (such as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy);*
- Heart infections; and
- *Other factors, such as direct impact to the chest.*

Additional Risk Factors:

- *Family history:* Sudden death of a close relative before age 50; history of heart conditions like cardiomyopathy, Marfan syndrome, Long QT syndrome, or heart rhythm problems; and/or history of immediate family members experiencing SCA.
- Heart murmurs
- High blood pressure

Requirements for Return to Play:

If a student athlete has experienced SCA or any of its warning signs, a consultation with a health care provider is necessary. To return to play, the athlete must provide:

- Written clearance from a doctor; AND
- Acknowledgment form signed by the parent or guardian and the student athlete.

More information:

More information may be found at Parent Heart Watch (<https://parentheartwatch.org/>)
