

Frequently Asked Questions regarding Act 59: the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act

1. What is sudden cardiac arrest (SCA)?

It is the sudden and unexpected loss of heart function. The heart stops beating, the student stops breathing and collapses. The student may be motionless or be convulsing (which looks like a seizure).

2. What causes sudden cardiac arrest?

There are three main causes. First, there could be a defect in how the heart is built or how it works. Second, there could be an electrical defect that interrupts the normal rhythm of the heart. Finally, there are other causes, such as illicit or prescription drug use.

3. Are there warning signs or symptoms?

Although SCA happens unexpectedly, some people may have signs or symptoms, such as:

- dizziness
- unexplained shortness of breath
- racing or fluttering heartbeat (palpitations)
- unexplained seizures
- fainting (syncope)
- fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- chest pains

These symptoms can be unclear and confusing in athletes. Often, people confuse these warning signs with physical exhaustion. SCA can be prevented if the underlying causes can be diagnosed and treated.

4. How can the conditions of Sudden Cardiac Arrest be detected?

Physical Exam and Medical History. Prior to participating in athletics in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, students are required to get a physical and complete a medical history. This form asks questions about family history and heart conditions. The physical exam should include listening to the heart. Here is some additional information about the exam - <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/115/12/1643/T1.expansion.html>

Heart Screening. An electrocardiogram (ECG) is an effective diagnostic tool that detects irregularities. An abnormal ECG exam can lead to other tests like an echocardiogram, stress test, halter monitor and more.

5. Are ALL Secondary Schools (i.e. Middle/High Schools) and Schools of Higher Education (i.e. Colleges/Universities) required to adhere to the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act?

The Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act applies to all school entities as defined in Section 1602-A of the Act of March 10, 1949 (P.L. 30, No.14) and is not intended for the higher education level. According to the definition of "Interscholastic athletics" which is defined under the Public School Code of 1949, both nonpublic and public school entities are required to adhere to this Act. See definition below.

Section 24 P.S. §16-1602-A. Definitions.--The following words and phrases when used in this article shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

Association: The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association.

Committee: The Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

Council: The Pennsylvania Athletic Oversight Council as established in Section 24 P.S. §16-1603-A.

Interscholastic athletics: All athletic contests or competitions conducted between or among school entities situated in counties of the second class, second class A, third class, fourth class, fifth class, sixth class, seventh class and eighth class.

Nonpublic school: A school, other than a public school within this Commonwealth, wherein a resident of this Commonwealth may legally fulfill the compulsory school attendance requirements of this act and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-352, 78 Stat. 241).

School entity: A public school, school district, nonpublic school or private school in this Commonwealth other than a private or nonpublic school which elects not to become a member of the association.

(1602-A added Nov. 22, 2000, P.L.672, No.91)

6. If a rugby club is a school club does it fall under the Act?

This club would be considered “...sports activities sponsored by school-affiliated organizations,” and would, therefore be covered under the act.

7. Does a youth school organization (pee wee/midget football in elementary school) fall under the regulations if they hold their games and practices on the high school fields?

If the athletic activity is sponsored by a school-affiliated organization it is covered. The language of the Act seems to indicate that it is substance of the activity (e.g. athletic activity including interscholastic athletics and non-interscholastic athletics) and not the location that determines whether the activities falls within the scope of the Act.

8. Interscholastic - Does it cover 7-12 grades only or can it also cover elementary schools?

There is no language in the Act which limits the coverage to Grades 7-12. Rather the Act refers to a school entity. A school entity as defined by the Public School Code of 1949 is “A public school, school district, nonpublic school or private school in this Commonwealth other than a private or nonpublic school which elects not to become a member of the association.” 24 P.S. § 16-1602-A.

The Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act defines what activities are specifically included in the definition of “Athletic Activity.” “Interscholastic Athletics” is the first enumerated item that is included under the definition of “Athletic Activity.” The Act provides “Interscholastic Athletics” as defined in the Public School Code of 1949. 24 P.S. § 16-1602-A.

The Interscholastic Activities Accountability chapter of the Public School Code of 1949 defines Interscholastic Athletics as: “All athletic contests or competitions conducted between or among school entities situated in counties of the second class, second class A, third class, fourth class, fifth class, sixth class, seventh class and eighth class. 24 P. S. § 16-1602-A. This seems to broaden the definition of interscholastic athletic to possibly include grades other than 7-12.

The Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act does not contain language that limits its scope to grade 7-12.

9. Which students and parents or guardians need sudden cardiac arrest education and how often?

All students participating in or desiring to participate in an athletic activity and the student's parent or guardian shall each school year, prior to participation sign and return an acknowledgement of receipt and review of an Athlete/Parent/Guardian Sudden Cardiac Arrest Symptoms and Warning Signs Information Sheet and Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review Form. Athletic activity includes: 1) interscholastic athletics, 2) An athletic contest or competition, other than interscholastic athletics, that is sponsored by or associated with a school entity, including cheerleading, club-sponsored sports activities and sports activities sponsored by school-affiliated organizations, 3) Noncompetitive cheerleading that is sponsored by or associated with a school entity, 4) Practices, interschool practices and scrimmages for all of the activities listed above.

10. Is there a sample Athlete/Parent/Guardian Sudden Cardiac Arrest Symptoms and Warning Signs Information Sheet and Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review Form?

The Department of Health has developed a sample Athlete/Parent/Guardian Sudden Cardiac Arrest Symptoms and Warning Signs Information Sheet and Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review Form. It is available by clicking [here](#).

11. Who is responsible for collecting and keeping track of the students and parents or guardians who must the sign sudden cardiac arrest symptoms and warning signs information sheet?

Each school entity is required to ensure that the appropriate information is maintained.

12. Will the Department of Health offer sudden cardiac arrest prevention training? Who can take the training? Will there be a charge to take the training?

The Department will provide links to the required training on its website. Anyone can take the online training free of charge.

13. How do I go about having my sudden cardiac arrest prevention training course approved by the Department of Health?

The Department of Health has approved an SCA prevention training course which is available on the Department's website. In order to ensure the integrity and consistency of the information provided to coaches and athletes, this curriculum will be the only training course approved by the Department of Health. The Department intends to offer a more comprehensive training course in the second full year of implementation of the Act.

14. How often does a coach have to take the training? What if I coach more than one sport each year?

The Act states that the SCA education course must be taken each school year. According to Section 101 of the School Code, a school year is defined as: The period of time elapsing in school districts of the first class between the first day of January and the 31st day of December of any year and in school districts of all other classes between the first day of July of one year and the 30th day of June of the following year. Effective July 1, 1997, for the 1997-1998 school year and each school year thereafter, school districts with a year-round education program may submit a request to the Secretary of Education for approval or disapproval the extend the school year until August 15 for the purpose of determining average daily memberships for students whose 180 days of instruction continue into the summer months.

15. Do all coaches need to complete annual training or just the head coach (example- assistant coaches)?

All coaches must be trained.

16. How long is the online coaches training?

Approx. 15 minutes online. A certificate of completion is provided at the end.

17. Who is responsible for collecting and keeping track that coaches have met their annual sudden cardiac arrest prevention certification training course?

Each school entity is responsible for collecting and tracking this information.

18. Who should determine if a student has experienced one or more sign(s) or symptom(s) prior to, during or following an athletic activity?

This Act gives the game official, coach from the student's team, licensed athletic trainer, licensed physician or other official designated by the school the opportunity to remove an athlete from a game to be examined by an appropriate medical professional to determine if the athlete experiences any signs or symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest.

19. What personnel are responsible for communicating that a student has experienced one or more sign(s) or symptom(s) prior to, during or following an athletic activity to other personnel at the district level (nurse, guidance, etc.)? Coach? Athletic Trainer? Athletic Director?

This protocol is not addressed in the Act.

20. If coaches take a sudden cardiac arrest prevention course successfully, does that allow them to make Return to Play decisions?

No, the coach must remove them from play but the law specifically states that the coach shall not return a student to participation until the student is evaluated and cleared for return to participation in writing by a licensed physician, certified registered nurse practitioner or cardiologist.

21. Are Athletic Trainers authorized to evaluate and clear students for return to play?

No. The Act clearly states that the student must be cleared for return to play in writing by a licensed physician, certified registered nurse practitioner or cardiologist.

22. In Pennsylvania who is considered a "licensed physician"?

The Medical Practice Act defines Physician as: "A medical doctor or doctor of osteopathy. 63 P.S. § 422.2.

23. How will confidentiality of student’s medical information be protected if this information is shared with school officials?

Any provider who evaluates or treats a student must follow HIPAA guidelines in terms of the dissemination of Protected Health Information (PHI), which means that (in the case of a minor) a parent would have to sign a release of information form for the provider to communicate with the school.

24. When a return to play note is provided, is there a specific person who must receive the note to allow the student to play again?

School entities must create and implement procedures to comply with the Act. This question would fall under procedures that the school entity must implement.

25. How do I develop a policy for return to play?

Schools should collaborate with coaches, school administrators, school nurses and other interested parties to develop a policy for return to play. Having a policy in place will insure consistency of application.

26. Is it mandatory that each school entity develop a policy for return to play?

This is not mandated by the Pennsylvania Law.

27. Is there an entity to which coaches will be reported when they are suspended?

This protocol is not addressed in the Act.

28. Who is responsible for penalizing coaches if penalties are found?

The governing body of the school entity shall set and enforce all penalties. The Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act clearly established minimum penalties for first, second, and third violations.

29. Who is policing, enforcing the coach violations and who is that reported to?

The school entities are responsible for policing and enforcing violations.