



As part of the district's efforts to keep students and staff safe, the Fulton County School System is continuing to implement its Public Access to Defibrillation (PAD) program that began last year in the high schools. This year's initiative places one Automated External Defibrillator in each middle school so that trained school staff can provide immediate medical response during emergency situations.

What is an Automated External Defibrillator?

An Automated External Defibrillator, or AED, is a device used to administer an electric shock to the heart of a cardiac arrest victim.

Which schools will receive AEDs?

All Fulton County high schools received AEDs in 2003-04. This year at least one AED will be placed in each middle school. The exact location of each AED will be determined separately for each school.

Who will be trained and what type of training will be received?

Training for the schools will begin in November and continue throughout the school year. A response team of administrators, front office staff, coaches and teachers will be trained at each school. The training includes demonstrations and information about how to operate the AED, how to recognize the signs of sudden cardiac arrest and when to call for emergency assistance. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training is also included. Proper training ensures that the response team will be comfortable using the AED and can successfully operate it in an emergency.

Who oversees the AED program?

The school system's Student Health Services office is responsible for Fulton County's AED program. Nurses from Student Health Services will work with each middle school to provide training and ongoing implementation of the program. A site coordinator at each school will ensure that each school follows the appropriate policies, procedures and quality control measures.

The American Heart Association (Georgia region), local emergency response agencies and representatives from CF Medical, which supplied the AEDs, have all helped implement the school system's AED program. Dr. Leon Haley, Director of Emergency Medicine at Grady Health System, the school district's medical adviser, is providing medical oversight.

How does an AED work?

An AED has a built-in computer that assesses the patient's heart rhythm and judges whether defibrillation (electric shock) is needed. The computer analyzes the heart rhythm through adhesive electrode pads placed on the patient's chest. It then advises the operator whether a shock is needed through audible and/or visual prompts. The electric current delivered through the electrode pads momentarily stuns the heart and gives it an opportunity to resume beating effectively.

How are AEDs useful and why are they important?

According to the American Heart Association and medical research, AEDs increase the chances of survival for victims of sudden cardiac arrest. Proper use and access to an AED can provide lifesaving aid to cardiac arrest victims.

Is an AED safe to use?

Yes, if used properly an AED is safe for both the person administering the shock and the cardiac arrest patient. Each AED has multiple safeguards and warnings that apply before any energy or electric shock is released. In addition, each AED is programmed to deliver a shock only after it has detected an irregular heart rhythm and has determined that defibrillation is necessary. This prevents a shock from being delivered accidentally. Audible and/or visual prompts guide the user through the process.

Which defibrillators are being used in schools?

The Philips HeartStart OnSite AED is the model chosen by the school system. The Philips AED was chosen because of it is easy to use and has high safety ratings. It is the only defibrillator available that carries the American Heart Association's "IIB Classification/Recommendation," which means it has proven to be safe and clinically effective.

Will an AED always resuscitate someone in cardiac arrest?

No. An AED only treats certain abnormal or irregular heart rhythms. In some cardiac arrest cases, the heart may not respond to electric shocks and needs medication and breathing support instead. AEDs are also less successful when the victim has been in cardiac arrest for longer than a few minutes and if no CPR has been provided. However, an AED can greatly improve a cardiac arrest victim's chances for survival if it is used quickly and properly.

What about liability?

The Georgia Good Samaritan Law (O.C.G.A. § 51-1-29) protects people from civil damages as a result of providing emergency treatment to save someone's life. This law includes the use of AEDs.

What is the American Heart Association's position on AEDs?

The American Heart Association strongly encourages placing AEDs in public and private settings where large numbers of people are found or are at high risk for sudden cardiac arrest, including in schools. The American Heart Association also supports establishing PAD (Public Access to Defibrillation) programs as an important way to save the lives of thousands of cardiac arrest victims. The American Heart Association has developed recommendations and guidelines for such groups to use when implementing PAD programs, which Fulton County has successfully followed.

Can anyone buy an AED?

No. AEDs are manufactured and sold under guidelines approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). Current FDA rules require a physician's prescription or order to buy an AED and to ensure medical oversight. Each device typically costs between \$2,000 and \$4,000.

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For more information, contact Student Health Services at 404-763-6836.

