

Save Lives This Heart Health Month: The Importance of CPR and AED Training

Every February, Heart Health Month reminds us to prioritize cardiovascular well-being. One critical way to contribute to this effort is by learning CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) and how to use an AED (Automated External Defibrillator). These skills can be lifesaving when someone experiences sudden cardiac arrest or a heart attack. Here's why they matter and how you can take action.

Recognizing the Signs of a Heart Attack

Understanding the warning signs of a heart attack can save precious time:

- **Chest Discomfort:** Persistent pain, pressure, or squeezing in the chest, often in the center or left side
- **Upper Body Pain:** Discomfort spreading to the shoulders, arms, back, neck, or jaw
- **Shortness of Breath:** Difficulty breathing, with or without chest discomfort
- **Other Symptoms:** Cold sweats, nausea, dizziness, or lightheadedness

If someone exhibits these symptoms, call 911 immediately. Acting quickly can mean the difference between life and death.

Why CPR and AED Training Matters

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) affects over 356,000 people in the U.S. annually, and immediate action can double or even triple survival rates. CPR and AED usage are key interventions during such emergencies:

- **CPR:** Helps circulate oxygen-rich blood to the brain and vital organs.
- **AED:** Delivers a shock to restore normal heart rhythm in cases of ventricular fibrillation or pulseless ventricular tachycardia.

Despite their importance, only about half of bystanders intervene during cardiac emergencies. Training equips you with the confidence and knowledge to act decisively.

Steps to Performing CPR

1. **Check the Scene and the Person:** Ensure the area is safe and confirm the person is unresponsive.
2. **Call for Help:** Dial 911 and, if available, send someone to retrieve an AED.
3. **Begin Chest Compressions:**
 - Place the heel of one hand on the center of the chest and the other hand on top.
 - Push hard and fast, compressing at least 2 inches deep at a rate of 100-120 compressions per minute. Allow the chest to fully recoil between compressions.

4. **Continue Until Help Arrives:** Keep performing CPR until emergency personnel or someone trained with an AED can take over.

Using an AED

1. **Turn It On:** Most AEDs provide voice instructions to guide you.
2. **Attach Pads:** Place the adhesive pads on the person's bare chest as indicated.
3. **Follow Prompts:** The AED will analyze the heart rhythm and advise *if a shock is necessary*.
4. **Deliver the Shock if Instructed:** If a shock is necessary, ensure no one is touching the person, then press the button to administer the shock.
5. **Resume CPR:** Continue chest compressions until professional help arrives.

Getting Trained: Where to Start

CPR and AED training is widely available through organizations such as:

- **The American Heart Association (AHA):** Offers in-person and online classes
- **The Red Cross:** Provides community courses and certification programs
- **Local Community Centers:** Many fire departments and hospitals offer affordable or free training sessions.

Heart Health Month is the perfect time to commit to learning these life-saving skills. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) offers a robust toolkit that includes items you can share with your family and community. By being prepared, you could save a life when it matters most.