



NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINERS' ASSOCIATION HOSTED VIRTUAL MEDIA BRIEFING

Sudden Cardiac Arrest: Reducing Risk & Ensuring Best Care in Sport & Life

DALLAS, TX (March 3, 2025) – The [National Athletic Trainers' Association](#) (NATA) hosted a virtual media briefing last Thursday, **Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA): Reducing Risk & Ensuring Best Care in Sport & Life**.

To review the full program recording please click [here](#).

“With February recognized as American Heart Month, the National Athletic Trainers' Association convened an interdisciplinary panel of health care experts to put a spotlight on SCA with topline recommendations and protocols from the youth to professional levels of sport, physical activity and life,” said [NATA President A.J. Duffy III, MS, ATC, PT](#), who also moderated the program.

“Participants discussed the importance of Emergency Action Plans, CPR and AED training; their own experience with SCA and in some cases, saving the lives of others from SCA; among other considerations.”

[In one year alone, 436,000 Americans die from a cardiac arrest.](#)

SCA occurs when the heart malfunctions and stops beating. It often happens suddenly and without warning and when an electrical malfunction in the heart causes an irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia). SCA is NOT a heart attack which is caused by a blockage of blood flow to the heart. Someone who suffers a heart attack can still be responsive and breathe, while a sudden cardiac arrest victim is NOT breathing and UNRESPONSIVE.

NATA and the [Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation](#), a briefing participant, are coalition members of the [Smart Heart Sports Coalition](#) spearheaded by the National Football League in 2023 to advocate for all 50 states to adopt evidence-based policies to help prevent fatal outcomes from SCA among high school students. In December 2024, the [HEARTS Act](#) was passed to help ensure students and staff in schools nationwide are prepared to respond to a cardiac emergency. In schools with AEDs, children who experience cardiac arrest are seven times as likely to survive as children in schools without AEDs. Every minute counts, every minute can save a life.

Key Statistics:

- [SCA is a national public health crisis and affects over 1,100 people a day](#)

- [Only 1 in ten survives SCA with 7 in 10 SCAs happening in the home](#)
- Cardiac arrest is the #1 cause of death for student athletes and the [leading cause of death](#) on school campuses.
- High intensity sports are risk factors for cardiac arrest, and strenuous exercise [increases the risk](#) of SCA by up to 5 times for those who have underlying heart conditions or structural disorders.
- [Studies have shown](#) that student athletes in general are up to 3x more likely to experience a cardiac arrest when compared to non-athletes; additionally, [1 in 300 youth athletes](#) have an undiagnosed heart condition.
- Of the people with cardiac arrest who receive a [shock from an AED](#) in the first minute, 9 out of 10 live.

Panelists and participating organizations included:

Cleveland Clinic

[Michael S. Emery, MD, MS, FACC](#), co-director, Sports Cardiology Center, Cleveland Clinic Heart, Vascular & Thoracic Institute; associate professor of Medicine, Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine of Case Western Reserve University

National Athletic Trainers' Association

[Darryl Conway, MA, LAT, ATC](#), executive senior associate athletic director; chief health & welfare officer, University of Michigan Athletics; co-owner, Sports Medicine Emergency Management, LLC (SMEM); board member, Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation

[Mark D'Anza, MEd, LAT, ATC](#), AED Project Facilitator, Clark County School District (Las Vegas), former NATA Secondary School Athletic Trainers' Committee, District 8 representative

[Robb S. Rehberg, PhD, ATC, NREMT](#), senior medical advisor and director of Game Day Medical Operations, National Football League; professor, Athletic Training and Sports Medicine, William Paterson University (Wayne, New Jersey)

[Joe Thompson, ATC](#), head athletic trainer, Pleasant High School (Marion, Ohio)

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation

[Joe Farrell, DPT, FAPTA](#), chair, Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation

[Gina Peattie, MPA](#), executive director, Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation

NATA General SCA Prevention & Treatment Recommendations:

Prevention:

- Review state SCA prevention acts
- Review and practice your EAPs

- Ensure facilities equipped with AEDs and staff trained on CPR and AED use (check AED batteries/clearly identify AED locations)
- Consider common factors that put athletes and those physically active at risk
- Educate coaching staff and others on SCA signs and symptoms
- Athletes should undergo cardiovascular screening before athletic participation: an electrocardiogram can help identify underlying conditions that put the athlete at greater risk)

In the Moment:

- Recognize SCA
- Activate EAP and start CPR
- Remove restrictive clothing and apply AED
- Identify who's in command; a health care professional, such as an athletic trainer, should handle the situation
- Anticipate next steps in EAP and offer to help - Stay calm

Return To Play

- Monitor symptoms
- Written medical clearance
- Gradual return to play

NATA Suggested Resources

[National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Emergency Action Plan Development and Implementation in Sport](#)

[NATA Matters of the Heart Handout](#)

[NATA Sudden Cardiac Arrest Checklist](#)

[Preventing Sudden Death in Secondary School Athletics Best Practice Recommendations](#)

[Preventing Sudden Death in Collegiate Conditioning Sessions Best Practice Recommendations](#)

[National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Preventing Sudden Death in Sports](#)

[Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation](#)

[Cardiac Arrest Survivor Alliance](#)

For more information, please visit nata.org or atyourownrisk.org. March is National Athletic Training Month with the 2025 theme: Champions in Health Care.

About NATA: National Athletic Trainers' Association – Health Care for Life & Sport

Athletic trainers are health care professionals who specialize in the prevention, diagnosis,

treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and sport-related illnesses. They prevent and treat chronic musculoskeletal injuries from sports, physical and occupational activity, and provide immediate care for acute injuries. Athletic trainers offer a continuum of care that is unparalleled in health care. The National Athletic Trainers' Association represents and supports 40,000 members of the athletic training profession. Visit nata.org for more information.

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