

A guide for consumers

Cardiac Arrest and Defibrillators



What is cardiac arrest?

Cardiac arrest is the term given to the sudden loss of heart function. The heart is no longer pumping blood and oxygen around to the vital organs of the body. A cardiac arrest is different to a heart attack where a person is awake and has symptoms such as pain in the chest, difficulty breathing, nausea or feeling light-headed. If a person is experiencing a heart attack or more serious cardiac arrest, call Triple Zero (000) immediately for an ambulance.

Signs of a cardiac arrest are present when a person is:

- Unconscious
- Unresponsive
- Has no pulse
- Has absent or abnormal breathing

How common is cardiac arrest?

Over 8,500 people experience an out of hospital cardiac arrest in NSW every year. Only 12% will survive. For every minute that passes after a person has a cardiac arrest, the chance of survival decreases. Quick action could save a life.

What actions can be taken to survive an out of hospital cardiac arrest?

Anyone can try to save the life of someone who has experienced a cardiac arrest by acting quickly to restore the heart beat with CPR and defibrillation.

If you believe someone has suffered a cardiac arrest, take immediate action:

- Call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance

- Push hard and fast in the centre of the chest to start CPR
- Shock using a defibrillator as soon as possible to restart the heart, if one is available

What is cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)?

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is the technique of chest compressions combined with rescue breathing. Early CPR saves lives. The Australian and New Zealand Committee on Resuscitation recommends that bystander CPR be actively encouraged. Resuscitation using the steps DRSABCD should be followed for cardiac arrest and is taught in all first aid courses in Australia. It is important that first aid skills are up to date.

Further information is available on the Australian Government's healthdirect website at: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/how-to-perform-cpr>

What is a defibrillator?

A defibrillator (known as an automated external defibrillator or AED) is a small, portable device designed to deliver a controlled electrical shock to a person experiencing certain cardiac rhythms. Defibrillators must be used in conjunction with CPR.

Remember:

- Anyone can use a defibrillator – they have verbal and visual instructions to guide you.
- You cannot hurt someone by using a defibrillator.
- A defibrillator only shocks a person who is in cardiac arrest.