

Heartsafe Community Programme

Lucy Ryan, CPR and ECC Department Administrator and Sarah Cain, CPR and ECC Department Manager, Irish Heart Foundation

Introduction

The Heartsafe Community Programme is an Irish Heart Foundation initiative, launched by President Mary McAleese in March 2005, which aims to encourage all communities to strengthen every link in the 'Chain of Survival' in their community.

The Chain of Survival concept comprises four vital links that can save a life: early access, early cardiopulmonary resuscitation, early defibrillation and early advanced care. The Irish Heart Foundation awards 'Heartbeats' in recognition of each step a community takes to strengthen their Chain of Survival.

Chain of Survival

Early access

Early access involves recognising that a person is in cardiac arrest and calling for help by dialling 999 or 112. Treatment can be more effective if given quickly and every minute counts!

Early cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

Early CPR is a simple, easily learned emergency procedure used when someone's breathing and heartbeat stop suddenly. CPR provides rescue breathing and chest compressions to the victim and is most effective when it is started immediately after the victim's collapse.

In many cases, CPR alone will not resuscitate the patient; however, it will help to keep the victim's brain and heart supplied with oxygen until medical help arrives.

Early defibrillation

Early defibrillation saves lives. This involves trained personnel delivering an electric shock to the patient's chest to help restore the normal function of the heart. Early defibrillation is the link in the Chain of Survival that is most likely to improve survival rates.

Defibrillation can be performed using an automated external defibrillator (AED) by trained lay people. An AED guides the user through the steps of defibrillation. This device recognises life-threatening rhythms and advises the user to shock or not to shock the victim.

Early advanced care

Early advanced care includes basic life support measures plus more specialised care, which would be approved by doctors, nurses, paramedics or other appropriately trained rescuers.

Heartsafe Community Programme

Cardiovascular disease is Ireland's biggest killer disease with over 10,000 deaths each year. Some 6,000 of these fatalities are from sudden cardiac arrest and, as 70% of these occur out of hospital, it is imperative that communities, schools and businesses are equipped and prepared to respond. The current survival rate from an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in Ireland is a staggeringly low 1%.

There is significant information to suggest that early intervention can have a major impact on survival rates from sudden cardiac arrest. With this in mind, the Irish Heart Foundation established the Heartsafe Community Programme. The programme aims to raise awareness of each link in the Chain of Survival and encourages communities to be trained in CPR and the use of AEDs. It also encourages adherence to best practise standards in the absence of legislation.

In recognition of these efforts, the Irish Heart Foundation awards Heartbeats for each step a community takes to strengthen their Chain of Survival. Heartbeats can be earned for such things as CPR training, having an AED programme or written plans for CPR/AED/emergencies in the community.

The number of Heartbeats required to become a Heartsafe Community depends on the type of community applying to the programme. The programme recognises four types of communities and each has different Heartbeat criteria and requisites to become Heartsafe. The four different types of communities which can apply to the programme are: communities (towns and villages); schools; workplaces; and healthcare facilities.

The Heartsafe Community Award is valid for two years. Communities awarded the Heartsafe Award will be expected to be involved in ongoing Heartsafe activities to maintain the

Heartsafe Award. The Heartsafe Community Programme will be invaluable in maintaining the momentum and enthusiasm needed for this.

AED responder programme

Establishing an AED responder programme can strengthen the first three links in the Chain of Survival in your community. It involves the placement of AEDs in specific locations with responders trained in CPR and the use of an AED, along with a system to alert those responders to an emergency, when necessary, so they can take action.

To ensure a safe, effective and successful AED responder programme, it is essential to have the following four key elements.

- GP/physician oversight to monitor the programme and ensure quality improvement and control.
- Use and maintenance of the AED(s) according to the manufacturer's specifications.
- Trained responders in both CPR and AED use.
- Integration of the AED programme with the local ambulance service and/or emergency medical system.

There are also many other aspects which are important to consider when setting up an AED responder programme. It is recommended that you establish and document the policies and procedures for your AED programme. It is also important to consider where the AEDs are to be placed, to have an ongoing training plan, insurance coverage for the programme, where possible to link the programme to the emergency services and to establish procedures for follow up after an event.

Throughout Ireland, workplaces and communities are putting such AED responder programmes in place. An example of such a programme is the AED responder programme in place at Dublin City Council.

Heartsafe communities

On 30 June 2005, Dublin City Council became the first Heartsafe Community at a presentation at City Hall. This award recognised the steps taken by the council to improve the survival rates of cardiac arrest victims. At the time of the award, Dublin City Council had purchased 25 AEDs for placement throughout their offices and had trained 155 staff to use them.

"They are located so that any cardiac arrest victim can be treated within three minutes. We intend to continue with this programme in Dublin City Council until as many staff and customers as possible have access to this vital life saving equipment," said Corporate Health and Safety Manager, Bruce Philips. Dublin City Council hoped to have 500 staff trained in first aid and AED skills by the end of 2005.

Dublin City Council is to be commended in the co-operative initiative it has taken in establishing its AED programme. All of the staff who volunteered to take part in the training and the

staff of the Dublin Fire Brigade, who provided much assistance, are to be highly praised for their efforts. It is hoped that this initiative will inspire other public organisations to follow suit.

In December 2005, Edmondstown Golf Club became the first Heartsafe Golf Club in Ireland. The programme was co-ordinated by Donal Casey of the Dublin Fire Brigade. An AED was installed in the clubhouse, 15 staff were trained in the use of CPR and the use of the AED and received 90 day skills renewals.

At the time of their Heartsafe application, 35 golfers were trained in CPR and this training is ongoing. Three hundred and forty-seven regular golfers have been given a whistle and a laminated card to attach to their golf bags. In the case of an emergency, they have been instructed to dial 999, ring the clubhouse and then blow the whistle to seek a CPR-trained golfer.

A golf buggy has been modified to support a spinal board from an ambulance to enable the transport of a casualty across the golf course in the event that an ambulance is unable to travel across the course due to soft ground conditions. It is innovative programmes such as this that the Heartsafe Programme would like to encourage.

Development of the Heartsafe project

Communities across the country have expressed interest in becoming Heartsafe and, to date, the towns of Clonmel, Co Tipperary, Roosky, Co Roscommon, Carlow Town and the Iberagh Peninsula, Co Kerry have indicated their intention to launch the programme. Clonmel plans to install 15 AEDs and train 10% of its population in CPR in association with the Irish Red Cross. The Chief Executive of the Irish Heart Foundation, Michael O'Shea, praised these initiatives.

"I commend these groups for taking actions which could help save a life in their community. Any village, town, club or group can apply to become Heartsafe and the Heart Foundation will guide the group towards achieving the certification," said Mr O'Shea.

Becoming Heartsafe

If your community has started to complete some of the Heartsafe activities and would like to apply to be recognised as a Heartsafe Community, please contact the ECC/CPR Training Department of the Irish Heart Foundation and we will send you a Heartsafe Community Pack.

Each pack includes advice on CPR training, establishing an AED programme, how to keep your heart healthy and how to apply to become a recognised Heartsafe Community.

To receive a Heartsafe Community Pack, please contact either Sarah Cain or Lucy Ryan on Tel. (01) 668 5001 and please make sure you specify which type of pack you require, i.e. community (towns and village), workplace, school or healthcare facility.