

Does Your Arena Have an Automatic External Defibrillator?

by Tom Morton

You may ask, “Have a what? – How do you spell it? – How do you pronounce it? – What is it? – Why do I need one?”

These are all good questions. Perhaps many ice arena managers may not be familiar with these life saving devices.

My friend, Dr. Alan B. Ashare, MD, Chairman of the USA Hockey Safety and Protective Equipment Committee recently wrote me and said, “Tom, I think that we ought to start thinking about putting these life saving devices in hockey rinks.” His statement gave rise to the heading on this article.

Now to answer two of the basic questions, a defibrillator is simply a device to be used when a person has suffered a cardiac arrest and who perhaps would otherwise die if not given prompt emergency treatment. In short, the defibrillator is a device used to shock a person back to life.

The other question, “Why do I need one in my ice rink?” was answered by Dr. Ashare by his statement, “In the situation where a player’s heart stops because of a blunt chest trauma from a hockey puck, the automatic external defibrillator (AED) can be a lifesaver.”

Portable defibrillators are being widely used. They weigh between four and seven pounds and cost between \$2,500 and \$4,500. American Airlines has them on all their flights. A lay person, particularly one who has had CPR training, can be taught to use an AED in five or six hours.

It has been estimated that about 225,000 Americans a year suffer cardiac arrest. It could happen in your ice arena. Being hit by a puck, by a hockey stick, by a body check or by hitting the boards all can result in a blunt chest trauma. A puck hitting a spectator, a spectator fight or player fight could cause trauma resulting in a heart attack.

Use of a defibrillator by persons other than emergency medical technicians is advocated by the American Heart Association as well as by many other groups.

Mickey Eisenberg, MD, PhD, in an article stated that in the event of a sudden cardiac arrest, successful resuscitation requires a rapidly provided sequence of care. This sequence, quick access to emergency care, CPR, defibrillation and advanced care are termed the Chain of Survival. If all of the links on the chain come together quickly, there is a good chance for survival. When CPR is started within four minutes of a collapse and when defibrillation starts within eight minutes, there is a good chance of survival.

Whether your ice arena should have a portable AED may depend on many factors. How interested are you in being prepared for such an emergency? Can you include the purchase of a portable AED in your budget? How close to your arena is a Fire Department or a medical emergency response unit? What is their average response time to your facility? Can they be at your arena within eight minutes?

We all recognize that to include the cost of a defibrillator in the budget of an ice arena, coupled with the necessary time for training, may not always be economically feasible. Nevertheless, safety continues to be a major consideration for all ice arenas and the opportunity to save a life by being prepared should be on every ice arena manager’s agenda.

In two recent studies, according to an article in the New York Times by Denise Grady, one conducted at casinos and the other on airlines, the survival rates were 53% and 40% for people who had cardiac arrest and who were treated almost immediately with portable defibrillators.

An alternative suggestion may be to contact and encourage your local Fire Department or Medical Emergency Response Unit to acquire a portable AED, if they do not already have such a unit. Saving a life, whether it be an ice hockey player, coach, game official, spectator or employee, should be a matter for consideration at every ice arena. Whether you should have a defibrillator at your facility is a decision for each arena to consider. In any event, having someone trained in CPR should be on your agenda.

** Tom Morton is a senior member of the law firm of Morton & Morton in Zebulon, GA. He is the attorney for and president of NEISMA and former secretary of the ASTM subcommittee on ice arena facilities.*