

On-Site Emergency Strategies for Heart Attack: A Special Report for Meeting and Event Planners

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Because special occasions are emotional events, they create stress. At a banquet honoring a "Man of the Year," the recipient, while recounting fond memories, collapsed and died during his acceptance speech. In the opening ceremony of the 1996 Olympics, a person died holding a flag in the parade, while another delegate had a cardiac arrest. In 2004, the CEO of McDonalds died suddenly of a heart attack at a meeting.

Every time people come together to meet, you run a risk. And if you wait to call 911, it is often too late.

The critical role you can play in saving lives

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), 250,000 Americans die from cardiac arrest every year. That's nearly 700 people a day - about the equivalent of three 747s crashing. Relying only on emergency medical services, as conventionally done, can be fatal. In New York City, for example, the average arrival time is about 12 minutes - and the survival rate is less than two-percent.

Although it is imperative to dial 911 in an emergency, meeting and event planners can play a vital role in saving lives. Preparedness is key.

Survival hinges on quick intervention - ideally within three minutes.

Would you know what to do if a person attending your event suddenly collapsed? Would anyone know what to do? When cardiac arrest happens, the victim loses consciousness, there is no pulse or breathing - and the person dies within minutes.

The Terminology

The terms "heart attack," "cardiac arrest," and "myocardial infarction" all refer to a medical emergency due to a blood clot blocking a coronary artery.

The Warning Signs of Cardiac Arrest

Cardiac arrest can often appear to be a fainting spell, especially in someone older. Symptoms are pale skin, profuse perspiration, and declining blood pressure. The skin becomes cold and clammy and the person appears to be dying. All of this happens very quickly and intervention has to be immediate.

What To Do While Waiting for Emergency Personnel to Arrive

Someone should call 911 immediately. If a cell phone is working in the vicinity of the emergency, call from where you can see the victim while another person performs emergency measures so that you can give a current report to include:

1. The location of the emergency
2. The telephone number from which the 911 call is being made

3. What happened to the victim
4. The condition of the person

Have everyone step back that is not assisting. Immediately shake the victim's shoulders and ask loudly, "Are you all right?" Clearly s/he is not, but you ask to elicit a response and try to keep the person awake with the stimulation of a loud voice.

If it appears to be a fainting spell, ask the person if s/he is a diabetic because hypoglycemia could elicit similar symptoms.

If the person indicates s/he is experiencing chest discomfort with nausea, this could be either a heart attack or symptomatic of internal bleeding.

Have the person lie down and protect the head with something soft such as a folded jacket or tablecloth. Wait until emergency personnel arrive.

If the person is unresponsive...

Check for respiratory arrest by listening for the breath or observing the chest moving. Check for signs of circulation such as coughing, movement, and pulse.

If the victim shows no sign of circulation or pulse, it is essential to open the airway. With his/her arms alongside the body, tilt the head back and lift the chin. The rescuer should be at the victim's side ready to perform rescue breathing and chest compression.

Your Best Strategy: Training Your Staff

Lives can be saved with prompt cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and a device called an automatic external defibrillator (AED).

What is CPR?

CPR is a procedure that teaches how to recognize the warning signs of cardiac arrest and how to intervene to save lives. The ABC's of CPR are:

- A. Airway - Opening the airway
- B. Breathing - Checking breathing and performing rescue breathing
- C. Circulation - Checking for signs of circulation and performing compression and ventilations

What is an AED?

An AED is a device that administers an electric shock to the heart through the chest wall; the shock stops the abnormal heart rhythm, and this gives the heart the opportunity to resume a normal beat. It is effective. According to the AHA, with a nationwide recovery rate of only 5% from cardiac arrest, the recovery rate at O'Hare Airport is 65% since the addition of the AED.

The AED assess the patient rhythm and will only discharge a shock for the two arrhythmias that most commonly cause cardiac arrest: ventricular fibrillation and fast ventricular

tachycardia. These arrhythmias are life threatening because they weaken the quality of the heart beat and blood cannot be pumped throughout the body.

Train your staff to administer CPR and use an AED

Anyone who has been properly trained can administer CPR and use an AED to save a life. The American Heart Association and local hospitals provide CPR classes. Be sure you and members of your staff who are typically on-site at your meetings and events receive this training.

In summary...

Meeting and event professionals can no longer overlook the critical importance of their role in life saving. Remember that according to the AHA, 1,400 people die from a heart attack every day.

Being prepared can be the difference between life and death.