

# Learn About Sudden Cardiac Arrest in Young Athletes

## What is sudden cardiac arrest?

Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in young athletes. Most often, the death occurs during athletic training or competition. Sudden cardiac arrest occurs suddenly and often without warning. In the United States, a young competitive athlete dies suddenly every three days.

## What causes SCD?

- Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) is the leading cardiovascular cause of SCD (36%) in young athletes. HCM is a disease that causes thickening of the heart muscle.
- Electrical problems in the heart cause a dangerously fast heart rate that interrupts blood flow. With pumping disrupted, the heart cannot pump blood to the body's vital organs. Within seconds, a person loses consciousness and has no pulse. If SCA is not treated immediately, it can lead to sudden cardiac death (SCD) within minutes.

## Who is at risk?

- Young athletes are more than twice as likely to experience SCD than young non-athletes.
- Most victims are male (90%).
- More than half of HCM sudden death victims are black athletes (52%).
- The average age when SCD occurs in young athletes is 17.5 years.
- The risk of SCD increases with age.
- More than 2/3 of young athletes who die suddenly are basketball and football players (67%).

Young athletes with the following risk factors have a greater risk of SCA:

- Family history of unexpected, unexplained sudden death in a young person
- Fainting (syncope) or seizure during exercise, excitement or when startled
- Consistent or unusual chest pain and/or shortness of breath during exercise.

**If a student athlete displays any of the risk factors for SCA, refer them to a doctor for cardiac testing. Cardiac testing has the potential to identify hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) and save athletes from sudden cardiac death.**

## What to do in an HCM event

- 1.** Call 911. Tell the dispatcher where you are and that someone is not breathing or is unconscious.
- 2.** Administer CPR/AED immediately
- 3.** If the person wakes up and starts breathing, stay with them until EMS arrives

*For more information visit [www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/sudden-cardiac-arrest](http://www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/sudden-cardiac-arrest)*