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Some middle schoolers get CPR training

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If you have a heart attack, getting immediate CPR can double your chances of surviving.

Problem is, only one-third of victims ever receive cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. That's especially troubling in Louisville, where rates of heart disease run at twice the national average.

Now the American Heart Association, Louisville Metro EMS and Jefferson County Public Schools are embarking on a program to teach middle-school students life-saving skills they can pass along to family members, hopefully saving lives.

Beginning this week, about 1,400 Jefferson County seventh-graders at six schools will get a one-time, 20-minute CPR training. They'll be able to take home a kit that includes an inflatable practice dummy, a booklet and an instructional DVD to teach parents and neighbors.

Initially starting at North and South Olmsted, Moore, Farnsley, Lassiter and Liberty schools, officials hope to expand the program to all JCPS seventh-graders, an age at which most have the ability to do chest compressions.

"What we're looking for is a real paradigm shift," said Dr. Neal Richmond, director of EMS, who said broader knowledge of CPR could make a substantial difference because most heart attacks occur at home.

Nationwide, sudden heart attacks kill 250,000 to 350,000 victims each year, according to the heart association. During cardiac arrest, the heart stops beating, breathing ceases and no oxygenated blood circulates to the brain.

Chest compressions keep blood flowing until a shock can be delivered by an external defibrillator or until paramedics arrive to administer drugs. But with each minute that goes by without CPR or defibrillation, the chances of survival drop by as much as 10 percent.

"A minute, two minutes, three minutes of CPR can make all the difference in the world," said Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, who visited Farnsley Middle School on Tuesday to announce the program and watch the first students be trained.

Among the students was Kellye Fields, 12, who knows the importance firsthand. She said her aunt had a heart attack a few years ago, but luckily Kellye's father was in the house to provide CPR, and her aunt survived.

"I think I could do it now," she said.

Other communities, including Cleveland and Charleston, W.Va., are working on similar efforts, which have also shown promise in Scandinavian countries. Since the 1960s, CPR has been taught sporadically in the United States and other nations.

Despite efforts to boost CPR skill rates in the past decade, the percentage of heart attack victims receiving it hasn't changed, Richmond said.

The CPR Anytime kits to be used in Jefferson County Public Schools will be paid for by \$90,000 in grants, including from the medical company Medtronic.

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