

Congress may help put AEDs in schools

Cardiac devices can save lives

By Robert Davis
USA TODAY

A grass-roots push to put defibrillators into every school — to revive both children who suffer cardiac arrest as well as their teachers, custodians and visiting family members — might get a jolt from Congress.

Nobody knows how many people collapse inside schools or at school sporting events from cardiac arrest, but cities and states have begun counting the numbers of lives saved by defibrillators in schools. The devices are required in federal buildings and airliners. An auto-

mated external defibrillator (AED) is a computerized device that talks users, including children, through lifesaving steps to quickly zap a dying heart back into a normal beat during a cardiac arrest.

In Ohio, 13 lives have been saved with school defibrillators since 2005. In New York, 38 lives have been saved since 2002.

Schools are a logical place to put defibrillators, doctors say, because on any given day as much as 20% of a community's population passes through its schools.

While many of the people saved by the defibrillators have been adults, the preventable

deaths of children have fueled the grass-roots efforts. That includes Josh Miller, 15, of Barberton, Ohio, who died during a high school football game on Oct. 27, 2000.

His death is partly driving the effort in Congress to pass a bill that would provide federal matching funds to help put the \$1,000 devices in every school. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Betty Sutton, D-Ohio, calls for 3-to-1 matching federal funds to pay for defibrillators in schools.

"It's a great idea," says Peter Moyer, Boston's medical director for the Emergency Medical Services. "It will save lives, it's good for student self-esteem and introduces students to health careers."

Boston, which has one of the



Philips

Portable: Defibrillators are found in more public places.

best track records of saving victims of cardiac arrest, has AEDs in all of its public high schools and some elementary schools. Medics teach CPR and defibrillator use at the high schools. Similar efforts are underway in Nashville, where the fire de-

partment has trained health teachers to become CPR and AED instructors. The goal is to certify every ninth- and 10th-grader in CPR and AED use; 70 of 132 schools have the devices.

Across Tennessee, there have been 22 cardiac arrests at schools over the past five years, says Mark Meredith, medical director for Nashville's Public Access Defibrillation program. An AED was used to revive six of those people at the school.

Getting a shock from a defibrillator within just a few minutes of cardiac arrest is key to saving these victims. The odds of survival decrease 10% for every minute that a victim goes without such a shock, meaning that waiting for the typical EMS response to a 911 call is most often fatal.