

# Parish Nurse Notes

## National Heart Awareness Month



### **Sudden Cardiac Arrest**

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart muscle is severely reduced or stopped because one or more of the heart's arteries is blocked.

The most common underlying cause of sudden cardiac arrest is ventricular fibrillation. This irregular heart rhythm causes the heart to suddenly stop pumping blood.

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Here are some of the signs:

- Chest discomfort that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- Upper body symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath.
- Other signs may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

If you or someone you're with has one or more of the listed signs, don't wait longer than 5 minutes before calling 9-1-1 for help.

### **When Minutes Count**

A victim of VF sudden cardiac arrest suddenly collapses, is unresponsive to gentle shaking and stops breathing normally. Brain damage can start to occur in just 4 to 6 minutes after the heart stops pumping blood.

CPR can help keep blood flowing to the heart and brain until emergency help arrives. Defibrillation can stop the abnormal, erratic rhythm and allow the heart to resume its normal rhythm. An automated external defibrillator (AED) provides an electric shock, which is the only way to defibrillate.

Survival rates from VF sudden cardiac arrest are as high as 48 to 74 percent.

[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)