

Act 59: Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act

On July 29, 2012, Act 59, the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act ("Act") became effective. The Act sets forth certain requirements for school districts and student athletes with regard to participation in interscholastic athletics.

Student Education and Acknowledgment:

The Act requires that any "student participating in or desiring to participate in an athletic activity and the student's parent or guardian shall, each school year and prior to participation by the student in an athletic activity, sign and return to the student's school an acknowledgment of receipt and review of sudden cardiac arrest symptoms and warning signs information sheet." Attached to this Update is the form that has been developed by the Department of Health for students and their parents to review and sign. The Act also makes it optional for schools to hold an informational meeting to review the symptoms and warning signs of sudden cardiac arrest with student athletes.

Training of Coaches:

The Act requires that once each school year, "a coach of an athletic activity shall complete the sudden cardiac arrest training course offered by a provider approved by the department." The Department of Health has issued guidance in the form of a Frequently Asked Questions document (attached) that indicates that this requirement applies to all coaches of all athletic teams. The Act also prohibits coaches from coaching until they have completed the required training course. For the 2012/2013 school year, the Department of Health has adopted the attached "SCA Abbreviated Coaches Training" document as the vehicle for providing the mandatory training that is required by the Act. Therefore, every coach must review and sign the attached document prior to the start of the athletic activity. The Department has indicated that it plans to have a more comprehensive training program in place for the 2013/2014 school year.

Removal from Play:

The Act requires that students who are determined by a game official, coach from the student's team, certified athletic trainer, licensed physician or other official designated by the student's school entity to be exhibiting signs or symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest while participating in an athletic activity be removed by the coach from participation at that time. Students who are known to have exhibited signs or symptoms of cardiac arrest at any time prior to or following an athletic activity must also be prevented from participating in an athletic activity. Once a student has been removed or prevented from participating in an athletic activity pursuant to the Act, the student may not return to participation until the student is evaluated and cleared for return to participation in writing by a licensed physician, certified registered nurse practitioner or cardiologist.

Penalties:

Beginning with the 2014/2015 school year, the Act will require the school board of each school district to establish certain minimum penalties for coaches who are found in violation of the “removal from play” requirements of the Act. The most severe of those penalties imposed against a coach who is found to be violating the Act for a third time is a permanent suspension from coaching any athletic activity.