Resuscitation Council UK

Importance of defibrillators in public spaces

Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK) are the national experts in resuscitation. By working in partnership with RCUK we are expanding a network of publicly accessible defibrillators (also known as AEDs) across the UK. Access to publicly available defibrillators is a critical part of improving survival from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA). Across the UK, survival rates from OHCA remain stubbornly low, at an average of approximately 7-8% (around 1 in 12 people). However, when a defibrillator is used promptly, survival rates can increase dramatically, in some cases by up to 50%.

Time is one of the most critical factors in cardiac arrest survival. For every minute that passes without cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), a person's chances of survival decrease by approximately 10%. Emergency services are rarely available to attend the scene within the first few minutes of cardiac arrest, and therefore, access to a nearby defibrillator allows bystanders to deliver potentially lifesaving intervention in this critical window.

Publicly accessible defibrillators are a vital part of the chain of survival for people experiencing an OHCA. Making defibrillators accessible in public spaces helps reduce the time from collapse to the first potentially lifesaving shock, giving people the best possible chance of survival. Defibrillators should also be updated and maintained regularly and listed on the Circuit – the national defibrillator network. Registration allows bystanders and emergency services to quickly direct people to their nearest available device during a cardiac arrest. A defibrillator is a device that anyone can use, and when they are more available, they can help to save more lives. An unregistered defibrillator cannot be identified by emergency services, meaning a potentially lifesaving device may go unused when it is needed most.

Communities with higher numbers of publicly accessible defibrillators have better cardiac arrest outcomes, and increasing the visibility and availability of these devices, alongside increased bystander CPR training and awareness, can significantly improve survival rates from cardiac arrest across the UK.

Who we are: Resuscitation Council UK

Resuscitation Council UK (RCUK) is the national UK expert in resuscitation. We were formed in 1983 by a group of clinicians with the aim of improving survival rates for in and out of hospital cardiac arrests.

We develop the Resuscitation Guidelines, setting out the latest evidence-informed best practice for resuscitation and emergency care across all ages and care settings in the UK. They reflect the latest international research and have been shaped by insights from clinicians, educators, members of the public, and cardiac arrest survivors.

The Guidelines are designed to improve survival, strengthen emergency care systems, and ensure consistent, high-quality training and practice across the four nations. They provide a single, trusted evidence base to support healthcare professionals, educators, and responders.

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There are over 40,000 out of hospital cardiac arrests in the UK every year. Over forty years later so much has changed but unfortunately survival rates remain low, less than 1 in 10 people survive an out of hospital cardiac arrest in the UK, which is why we continue to be committed to the vision of a nation where everyone has the skills they need to help save a life.

RCUK & NWP Street Limited Partnership

Our work with NWP Street Limited, through our partnership with Bauer Media Outdoor, is transforming everyday infrastructure into a lifesaving network of emergency access points. Utilising NWP's street furniture, the partnership seeks to expand the provision of publicly accessible defibrillators across the UK. We believe that survival from cardiac arrest should not depend on your postcode. Defibrillators are being installed in select communication kiosks nationwide, each clearly marked and registered on The Circuit, the UK's national defibrillator network. This means emergency services can instantly direct people to the nearest available unit. To support those moments, RCUK CPQR codes will be added to relevant communication kiosks and bus shelters, delivering guidance on the steps needed for CPR and using a defibrillator.

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