Do you know CPR?

Anytime a young athlete collapses and requires immediate attention every second is crucial to their well-being, as how quickly and efficiently coaches react during these emergency situations can be the difference between life and death.
Let’s say the youth football team you’re coaching is scrimmaging another team, and in a blink of an eye a player collapses. Would you know what to do?

Or what if your soccer team is huddled together enjoying a post-game snack of orange slices and pretzels when one of the youngsters chokes and nears unconsciousness. Would you be able to quickly respond, or be frozen in fear?

A youth sports coach’s job doesn’t end with planning practices and calling plays on Game Day. So when a player suffers an injury – or faces a potentially life-threatening situation – coaches are expected to assess the player’s condition and make the right call as to what kind of care is needed.

And if a child requires cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) coaches should be able to respond accordingly.

However, it turns out that many coaches may not be ready to step up if an incident occurs. According to a 2012 survey conducted by SafeKids Worldwide, 40 percent of youth coaches have received no safety training.

**PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES**

Injuries are going to occur in the youth sports environment. Between all the stopping and starting and twisting and turning, combined with bodies colliding, there simply is no way to eliminate them from the equation. So it’s all the more reason why coaches should be trained to respond to injuries though first aid and CPR.

“Often youth coaches don’t have proper training and don’t know how to react in an emergency situation,” says Larry Cooper, chair of the National Athletic Trainers’ Association Secondary School Committee and head athletic trainer at Penn-Trafford High School in Harrison City, Pa. “When a youth athlete is injured, time is of the essence. The delay of proper care will reduce the chance of a positive outcome.”

For instance, when a child’s heart or breathing stops every second counts as blood flow ceases to reach the brain and other vital organs.

According to the American Heart Association, effective bystander CPR provided immediately after sudden cardiac arrest can double or triple a victim’s chance of survival, but only 32 percent of cardiac arrest victims get CPR from a bystander.

Why would a seemingly healthy child’s heart or breathing stop? It likely will have nothing to do with the current state of their health, and instead will be caused by external factors.

In the past 18 months the following incidents have occurred:

- In Northern California an 8-year-old’s heart stopped after he was hit in the chest by a pitch during a youth baseball game. A husband and wife watching the game – who just so happened to be off-duty paramedics – performed CPR until paramedics arrived, which saved the boy’s life.

- An 8-year-old attempting to steal third base during a youth baseball game in New Jersey collapsed into unconsciousness when he was hit in the chest by the ball thrown by the pitcher trying to get him out. A mother there to watch her son on the opposing team play rushed over and searched for a pulse. Finding none, she performed CPR that saved the boy’s life.

- At a high school girls soccer match in Bergen, N.J., one of the match’s two referees had sat down on a bench to rest during halftime when he suffered a heart attack, collapsed, stopped breathing and turned blue. Coaches from both teams rushed over and began administering CPR – and the man lived. Only 9.5 percent of people manage to live through heart attacks without intervention, according to the American Heart Association. If a bystander administers CPR, survival rates jump to 40 percent.

- A 15-year-old in Florence, S.C. collapsed while running a mile on the school’s track. School staff rushed to him and began performing CPR. “I remember when they were doing CPR I felt like I was floating above everyone,” the youngster told the local CBS affiliate. “I felt no emotion but I knew the situation was going on. I was above my body. I could see everyone around me but I couldn’t see faces. I didn’t know what they were doing.” What they were doing was saving his life.

**NAYS RECOMMENDS TRAINING**

The National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) strongly recommends that volunteer coaches are trained in CPR. That is further reinforced in its upcoming new Coaching Youth Sports training video, in which Miami Heat trainer Jay Sabol says: “Coaches should have first aid knowledge. They should be certified in CPR and they should be certified in first aid. If they are not certified in either one of those things then they have no business having an activity because if any of their athletes get hurt or have a life threatening situation, or a situation which can cause further damage to them, then they’ve got to have someone there who knows what to do.”

NYSCA coaches have access to a new First Aid and CPR section in their member area, which provides valuable information related to the care of young athletes.
Youth sports emergencies

“First aid and CPR training opportunities are widely available for free, or at a minimal charge,” Cooper says. “The problem is that coaches just don’t have information on where to get it. It’s important for leagues to use resources in the community. It should be a joint effort to share resources for instruction in first aid, safety and injury management.”

That’s exactly what the partnership between the Hillsborough County (Fla.) Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department’s Youth Athletics and the University of South Florida (USF) SMART Institute in Tampa demonstrates.

The USF SMART Institute is a comprehensive sports safety program that elevates the standard of care for youth, recreational, high school, collegiate and professional athletes through education, research and injury care and prevention.

About four years ago the institute reached out to Hillsborough to pitch the idea of safety and injury education for coaches. “We decided to broaden our community outreach to include organizations other than high schools,” said Dr. Barbara Morris, program director of the SMART Institute. “I think it’s important to offer this type of training to volunteer coaches who, for a short period of time each evening, are responsible for a number of the community’s children.”

Hillsborough works with 76 youth sports organizations to offer sports to more than 36,000 children in the community. “We believe in educating volunteers at every level in a youth organization,” said Aileen Henderson, youth sports manager at Hillsborough County Youth Athletics and a Certified Youth Sports Administrator (CYSA). “A well-educated volunteer will help make a higher quality experience for youth participants.”

Morris and Henderson worked together to develop first aid, CPR and automated external defibrillator (AED) trainings which are now mandatory for all coaches who coach at any Hillsborough County facility.

So far more than 1,000 coaches have received these trainings for free through the partnership with the SMART Institute.

But even though the trainings are offered to coaches for free, Hillsborough did experience resistance in the beginning. “I think part of the hesitation was the leagues’ feeling as if it was challenging enough to secure volunteers, and they may have felt if this was one more thing a volunteer would have to do,” said Henderson. “Providing the training at no cost a couple of times a month proved to be a valuable tool in getting the leagues and volunteers to buy-in to the training.”

EDUCATING VOLUNTEERS STRENGTHENS PROGRAMS

Taking the time to educate volunteers is also a strategy to strengthen the youth sports program itself. When a coach receives an education on how to work with children and teach sport-specific skills, and how to respond in emergency situations, they will perform their role with more confidence.

“I feel it’s a part of our obligation to our partners – the youth sports organizations – to ensure we make quality training available to them at no cost,” Henderson said. “If someone wants to volunteer their time, they should be provided all the tools they need without having to incur an expense to do so.”

The need for first aid and CPR training extends beyond coaches, too. Cooper suggests offering these trainings to all youth sports volunteers. “Any volunteer working with children should obtain first aid and CPR training,” he said. “The more people that are trained and ready to respond makes for a better situation when action is needed.”

While Hillsborough doesn’t require team parents and other volunteers to take first aid and CPR training, they are welcomed to do so. And this open invitation creates an environment that promotes education in youth sports – and just might save a life.

So as coaches across the country navigate their seasons – planning practices, designing plays and teaching skills – one of the biggest questions looming over the youth sports landscape is whether or not they are equipped to help a child facing a life-threatening situation.

Being a good teacher, a positive motivator and a quality role model are of the utmost importance. And knowing how to perform CPR on a child in need certainly fits on that list, as well.

Be prepared

The following are some tips youth sports administrators, coaches and sports parents can use to be prepared for medical emergencies that may occur at a youth sports event. Hopefully you won’t have to deal with a serious situation; however, it’s better to be prepared than to be helpless.

Complete first aid and CPR training: Find out if your youth sports program has resources to help you obtain first aid and CPR training. If not, the National Alliance for Youth Sports recommends finding local Red Cross classes. Register for a class in your area at http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class.

Create an Emergency Action Plan (EAP): An EAP contains everything you will need during an emergency, such as the physical addresses of your practice and game locations, player emergency contact info and emergency task assignments. Take the time to create an EAP before the start of the season so you’re not frantic for this essential information during an emergency. Download a free EAP template at http://www.nays.org/resources/emergency-action-plan.cfm.

Stock your first aid kit: Every coach or youth league should have well-stocked first aid kits on hand for an emergency. Make sure it contains items like non-sterile gloves, antiseptic spray or wipes, assorted Band Aids, ace bandages, flexible splints, athletic tape, scissors, ice packs and a CPR mouth protector.