



French high schools teaching lifesaving skills

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L'École secondaire publique Louis Riel students Tima Hacini and Jacob Weber demonstrate to Ottawa-Orléans MPP Phil McNeely how to use an automatic external defibrillator during a cardiac emergency situation.

EMC News - Ottawa-area French high school students are good people to have on hand in an emergency situation.

Thanks to a number of partnerships and sponsors, the city's 12 French high schools are churning out young people who know how to save lives.

The Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation launched the ACT High School CPR and Defibrillator program for all French schools in Ottawa at l'École secondaire publique Louis Riel on May 6.

The program will see more than 1,800 Grade 9 students from 12 high schools in the public and Catholic French school boards trained in lifesaving skills. The ACT Foundation is a national charitable organization dedicated to establishing CPR as a mandatory program in every Canadian high school.

"With our Sports-études program, we've gained a lot of recognition with the success of our teams," said Martin Bertrand, Louis Riel principal, explaining why this new automatic external defibrillator (AED) training will be especially beneficial for his school. "Whenever there are sports, there's a higher level of risks and potential for injury."

"Our government believes by having more citizens in our community who can respond when someone has cardiac difficulties will save more lives," said Ottawa-Vanier MPP and Minister of Community and Social Services Madeleine Meilleur.

The provincial government, along with the Ontario Trillium Foundation have joined with ACT alongside Eugene Melnyk, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the Sens Foundation to bring 255 mannequins, 51 defibrillator mannequins, 41 defibrillator training units and 12 defibrillators to the schools. Also lending a hand to the program in Ontario and nationwide are a group of health partners, including AstraZeneca Canada, Bristol-Myers Squibb Canada, Pfizer Canada and sanofi-aventis.

In 2008, the Ontario government announced a \$1.4 million investment to help the ACT Foundation enhance the CPR program by adding defibrillator training in high schools, which was a first in Canada. With the addition of training in French high schools, all 53 Ottawa high schools are now teaching the program.

"For every minute that passes without help, a person's chance of surviving a cardiac arrest drops by seven to 10 per cent. Defibrillation, when used in conjunction with CPR in the first few minutes, can dramatically improve cardiac arrest survival rates by more than 75 per cent," said David Sculthorpe, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario CEO, in a press release.

For Grade 10 student Lucas Chenier, learning CPR was already a part of his training as a lifeguard, but using an AED was new.

"CPR is the most important in a first aid situation, but a defibrillator can easily preserve someone's heart," said the 15-year-old student, who now notices the equipment on a regular basis.

"Ever since I was taught how to use (the AED), I notice it in public places like shopping malls," he said.

Twenty-eight physical education teachers were trained as CPR and defibrillator instructors for their students. At Louis Riel, a full eight-hour day is dedicated to the training at the beginning of April, explained teacher Ghiliane Médor.

To date, the ACT Foundation has set up the ACT High School CPR program in more than 1,500 schools across Canada, reaching more than 1.8 million students.