



Elmira students trained to do CPR and use defibrillator

Waterloo Record

November 16, 2009

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The training dummies are on the gym floor and a Grade 9 class in Elmira is ready to learn a life-saving skill.

"Guys can you get into a circle with your dummies. Put your dummies in front of you," Laurie Murray, a gym teacher at Elmira District Secondary School, told 50 students, who on Monday were putting to practice CPR skills they had already learned in the classroom.

Today's class also included instruction on how to use a portable defibrillator in conjunction with CPR. Throughout the region, over 130 user-friendly defibrillators have been placed in public facilities such as schools, arenas and community centres. They have saved two lives.

"The machine tells you what to do," said Murray, as she walked the class through the steps of using the defibrillator which could increase the survival rate of a heart-attack victim to 25 per cent.

This instruction is part of a community-wide push by Waterloo Region's ambulance service to have at least one person in every family trained in CPR because 80 per cent of cardiac arrests happen at home.

New this year is the CPR certification of 4,600 high school students with the Waterloo Region District School Board. Next year, the ambulance service hopes to train Grade 9 students attending the region's five Catholic high schools.

This high school program alone will generate one trained member in each regional household by 2040, said John Prno, regional director of emergency medical services.

"If we can get the participation level of citizen CPR to 50 per cent, then we are going to have a greater survival rate for cardiac arrest victims," said Roger Mayo, manager of operations for the regional ambulance service.

Currently, only about eight per cent of the region's population is trained in CPR, said Mayo, adding he hopes the students will teach their parents and siblings this lifesaving skill.

Murray tells the class that the defibrillator equipment also includes a razor, scissors and a towel. The machine's pads, which deliver a potentially lifesaving electric shock to a heart-attack victim, will only work on bare, dry skin. The scissors are used to cut clothing – including a bra- and the razor is used to shave a man's hairy chest.

"It might be embarrassing for a guy to cut a woman's clothing, especially a bra, but remember it saves a life," Murray, a trained CPR instructor, told the students.

The students work hard going through their paces using the training dummy. Call 911. Open up airway. Check for breathing. Give 30 chest compressions. Repeat until defibrillator arrives.

Make sure chest is bare and dry. Turn on defibrillator and follow automated instructions. Attach pads to patient's chest. Administer shock. "Don't touch patient while shock is delivered," the machine tells its user. "Shock delivered. Start CPR." The machine will also tell a person whether to push harder or faster while doing CPR.

"It is pretty hard work, but it pays off. You could actually save a life," said Austin Denstedt, 14, after administering 30 chest compressions. His arms are sore.

"At least I will be ready in case something happens," said Austin. "It's good to be taught early, because for future reference, you know what to do."

Mayo said learning CPR is like learning to ride a bike, one never forgets.

The cost of the equipment and program is covered largely by the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation of Canada. Regional taxpayers contribute \$80,000 a year to hire a co-ordinator to administer this program and other CPR training initiatives in the community.

Ambulance crews in the region respond to about 300 cardiac arrest calls every year. They rarely find bystanders doing CPR.

Mayo said bystanders are hesitant to perform CPR because they fear they will do it incorrectly.

"This will knock down those barriers. This is a lifesaving skill which they should remember for the rest of their lives."